

STORIES OF African-American Achievement

THE





Stories of African American Achievement is a collection of profiles of remarkable men and women who have made significant contributions to U.S. society from the nineteenth century to the present day. Some of those profiled laid the groundwork for the work of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and other leaders of the civil rights movement; others exemplify innovation and leadership in business, medicine and journalism. These profiles also appear as chapters in the online book, *Beyond Dr. King: More Stories of African-American Achievement*. Read about them here or online at http://www.america.gov/notable_african_americans.html

STORIES OF African-American Achievement

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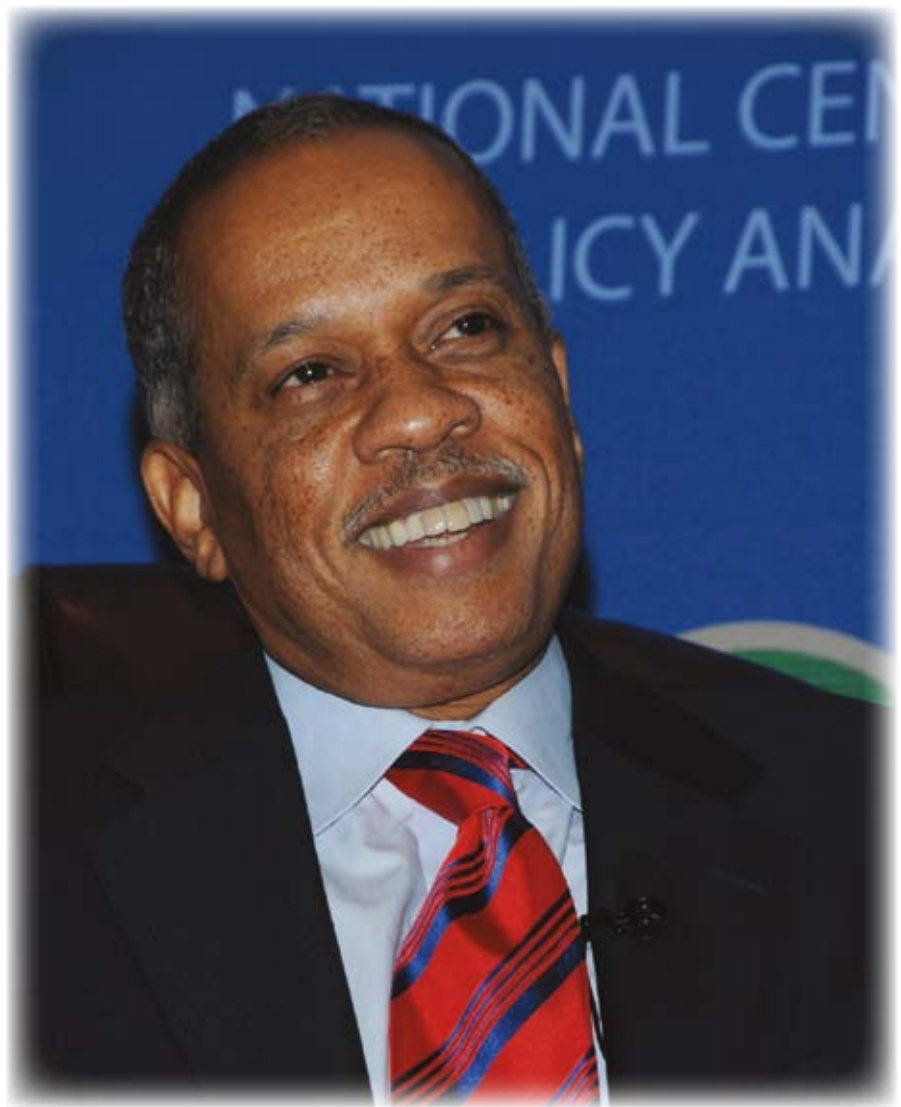
Juan Williams

LOOKING BACK

by **Juan Williams**

A few months ago, I was invited to lunch at the White House with President Obama. With me were prominent writers from major newspapers around the country, there to discuss current events and the economy. The talk turned to the impact of the recession on American men. At one point, when the discussion turned to the impact earlier recessions had on black men and their families, the president turned to me — the only other black person in the group — and said, “That’s something only Juan and I could understand.”

I am a 56-year-old American journalist with a deep interest in the history of our nation and specifically of black America. My career includes 23 years at the *Washington Post* as an editorial writer, op-ed columnist, and White House reporter. I have appeared on television regularly for more than two decades as a political commentator, first for CNN and now for the Fox News Channel. My daily talk show for National Public Radio ran for two years and I was an NPR senior correspondent for 10 years. I am also the author of several books.



Juan Williams is a journalist and political commentator.

My goal as a black journalist in this generation is to tell stories that reveal the joys and the struggles of

black Americans in an era of their greatest freedom. As a journalist at the *Washington Post*, my readers knew me



Black journalism and social commentary owed much to abolitionist author Frederick Douglass, educator Booker T. Washington, journalist editors T. Thomas Fortune and I. Garland Penn, and journalist-activist Ida B. Wells-Barnett.

through my byline, which — with no picture attached — gave no indication of my race. But I am part of a legacy of black journalists that extends throughout American history. It begins with Samuel Cornish, who published the first black-owned and -operated newspaper in New York City in 1827, *Freedom's Journal*. "Too long have others spoken for us," Cornish said in explaining why he was starting the paper, which focused on a call for the abolition of slavery. It also includes Frederick Douglass, who escaped from bondage in Maryland before founding an abolitionist newspaper, the

North Star, in 1847. Douglass used his journalistic standing to urge President Lincoln to fight against slavery. He even took the liberty of publishing an open letter to his old master, settling old scores and documenting the horrors of American slavery. Major black American journalists also include such distinguished names as W.E.B. Du Bois, one of the founders of the NAACP (National Association for Advancement of Colored People); T. Thomas Fortune, who started the *New York Age*; Ida B. Wells-Barnett, profiled in this book, who exposed the horrors of mob murder called lynching; and James Weldon

Johnson, who may be best known for having written what some called the Negro national anthem, "Lift Every Voice and Sing."

Their work told stories of black Americans, their lives and their political struggles, and challenged and celebrated black leaders — religious leaders, civil rights leaders, political leaders — and provoked the conscience of white America on racial issues. Major black leaders from Frederick Douglass to Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X all emerged as celebrated personalities in black publications before they were known to the wider world.

Stories of African-American Achievement seeks to highlight a few notable leaders who laid the foundations for future gains by African Americans and other minorities, and others who are forging new paths. The people profiled range from activist founder of the first African-American Christian church Richard Allen and world champion bicyclist Marshall Taylor, to more modern heroes, such as social entrepreneur Will Allen and renowned neurosurgeon Ben Carson. Also among them are writers and journalists.

I wanted to be a journalist for as long as I can remember. Despite the important role black journalists have played throughout American history, there were almost no black journalists working for major newspapers and television stations when I was growing up in New York City in the 1960s. The *New York Times*, the *New York Post*, and the *New York Daily News* did not have black writers — even in their sports sections. In fact, as a young boy, I was aware of just one: Louis Lomax, of the *New York Post*, who was limited to covering black community issues. The only place I consistently saw reporting by black writers was in a black newspaper published in Harlem called the *Amsterdam News*. Occasionally, I would see a black face

on a local television station's community affairs program that aired very early on weekend mornings.

But for a poor black kid in New York, newspapers and television provided a window on the world. I learned about racial conflict, the national civil rights movement, the assassination of President Kennedy, men on the moon, the Vietnam War, and the cultural revolution of rock and roll from the Beatles to Jimi Hendrix. That amazing array of stories created in me a desire to be a journalist who could tell people about the world I lived in. I thought that through journalism, I could help people understand the dynamics of power, race, and money in the United States. I also believed that once people knew about various injustices, they would insist on justice.

Racial riots occurred in my neighborhood. Militants staging these riots asked me to join them, and asked why I was attending school and church instead of standing tall as a defiant black man. They made me feel I was disloyal to my race because I was a schoolboy, not a street rioter. In 1965, when I was 14, I won a scholarship that sent me to a Quaker boarding school in Poughkeepsie, New York. I began reading the local newspaper and found that it did not cover blacks. There I saw my first journalistic opportunity. I began to write about NAACP meetings and community events in black neighborhoods, and the paper began to print them with my byline. I went on to become the editor of my high school newspaper. I found that the power of storytelling was immensely rewarding, especially when I was writing about events in the black community, which had been largely neglected by the media. The people I wrote about expressed excitement and gratitude that somebody was paying attention to them. Mayors, police officials, ministers, and even state legislators responded to my writing,

giving me a sense of the power of the written word to make a difference.

Throughout much of American history, blacks were absent from the great American story. In newspapers, the lives and events of black people were viewed as insignificant. Politicians did not seek black votes; in fact, the untold story is that blacks were kept from voting. And in obituaries, oftentimes the only thing noted about a black man upon his death was whether he had served whites — as a maid, driver, or cook. Early efforts to gain racial equality were viewed in the white press as disruptive, not noble, activities.

The media coverage of black America changed drastically in May 1954, when the Supreme Court handed down a landmark ruling in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*. In it, the Court found segregated public schools unconstitutional because they deprive black children of equal educational opportunities. Chief Justice Earl Warren argued, "... in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal."

With the Supreme Court's decision in the *Brown* case, major white newspapers began to cover the emerging modern civil rights movement. They focused heavily on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as the face and voice of that movement. King made national headlines when he led a successful boycott of the Montgomery, Alabama, bus system in 1955, staged to oppose the city's policy of racial segregation on its public buses. The Montgomery Bus Boycott made Dr. King a hero and a villain to those following the story of black Americans' fight for equality. Claudette Colvin and Dorothy Height, profiled in this book, are two women who joined that fight.

In the wake of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the civil rights movement

dominated the headlines of America's major newspapers. They all covered the "Little Rock Nine" crisis in Arkansas, in which President Eisenhower was forced to send federal troops into the state after its Democratic governor, Orval Faubus, prevented nine black students from entering their newly integrated high school. The mainstream media watched when, in September 1957, the students were escorted into their school by American troops.

The media's coverage of the controversies surrounding the civil rights movement sparked national debate. A spate of federal legislation addressing civil rights issues soon followed, including the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968. Even as this major legislative progress took place, race riots occurred in many northern cities.

As a young man, I was inspired, depressed and confused by the events spurred by the efforts of black Americans to be seen as equal citizens of the United States.

Ironically, the race riots of the late 1960s proved to be a major opportunity for black reporters. As cities were engulfed in the flames of racial conflict, more and more newspapers hired black reporters to go into their communities and cover these riots. It was often dangerous for white reporters to cover the riots firsthand, but that was not the case for black journalists. By the time I graduated from college in the mid-1970s, newspapers were actively looking for able black writers, and I was hired as an intern at the *Washington Post*.

If the previous generation of black journalists was directly involved with chronicling the story of the civil rights movement, my generation would have to tell the tale of emerging black politics in America's big cities. The federal civil rights legislation gave blacks voting power, and suddenly blacks appeared on city councils and school boards.

Black mayors were elected in cities from Cleveland to Los Angeles to Atlanta. The nascent political power of the black community was accompanied by the emergence of a black middle class. Soon, more blacks entered business, including the media, and before long, they were accepted and celebrated as professional athletes. Blacks in the entertainment industry were no longer limited in scope; Aretha Franklin and the Jackson Five became national stars. *The Cosby Show*, which captured the trials and travails of an affluent black family, became one of the biggest hits in television history.

Perhaps the greatest irony of my journalistic career was moving from the excitement of writing about black people as the agents of progress to covering Washington, D.C.'s black mayor, Marion Barry. I chronicled the scandals surrounding Barry for the *Washington Post*, including his arrest on drug charges. From my vantage point, Barry's actions hurt the black community because they suggested falsely that blacks could not be trusted in positions of political power. But many of my black readers did not see Barry the same way, and my reporting became the subject of harsh criticism. I was attacked for casting a negative light on a black political figure, and I was forced to justify my work as fair and impartial. In the end, the citizens of D.C. elected Barry mayor three times despite his many excesses.

Jesse Jackson's presidential candidacies in 1984 and 1988 also challenged me as a black journalist. Jackson was more interested in creating a modern civil rights movement than in winning the election, but he managed to ignite the nation's imagination about the possibility that a black man could be a legitimate candidate for the presidency. He generated euphoria and energy on the political left at a time when the conservative Ronald Reagan was

president and the country was swinging to the right. Jackson, however, was also prone to excess. He got himself into controversies that were hard to defend.

It was at this time, in the 1980s, that my work brought me back to the civil rights movement of my youth. I began to notice that while the nation was still embroiled in racial arguments over issues like affirmative action and school busing, a surprising number of Americans were largely unaware of the tremendous history of the U.S. civil rights movement. In an effort to make the story accessible to a broad audience, I teamed up with Henry Hampton, an influential documentary filmmaker. My book *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965*, is a detailed account of the struggles of that era. Hampton's 14-hour PBS documentary by the same name premiered in 1987. It won six Emmys and was nominated for an Academy Award.

Another high point of my career came in January 2008. I was on the set with my Fox News Channel colleagues in Des Moines, Iowa, watching as the returns of the Iowa caucuses poured in. Hillary Clinton was widely favored to beat Barack Obama in the nation's first primary race. But early returns showed that, against all odds, the young black senator was leading the pack. Obama went on to clinch the Iowa caucus that evening. I watched and read political thinkers on television and in print discuss this upset without mentioning what was most amazing to me: that a young black man had become the leading Democratic candidate for the president of the United States. Senator Obama eventually claimed the Democratic nomination and the presidency. The feelings of many black Americans were captured in headlines and articles in which they said they thought they would never see a black president in their lifetime. Though it was not inconceivable to me, I was astonished too.

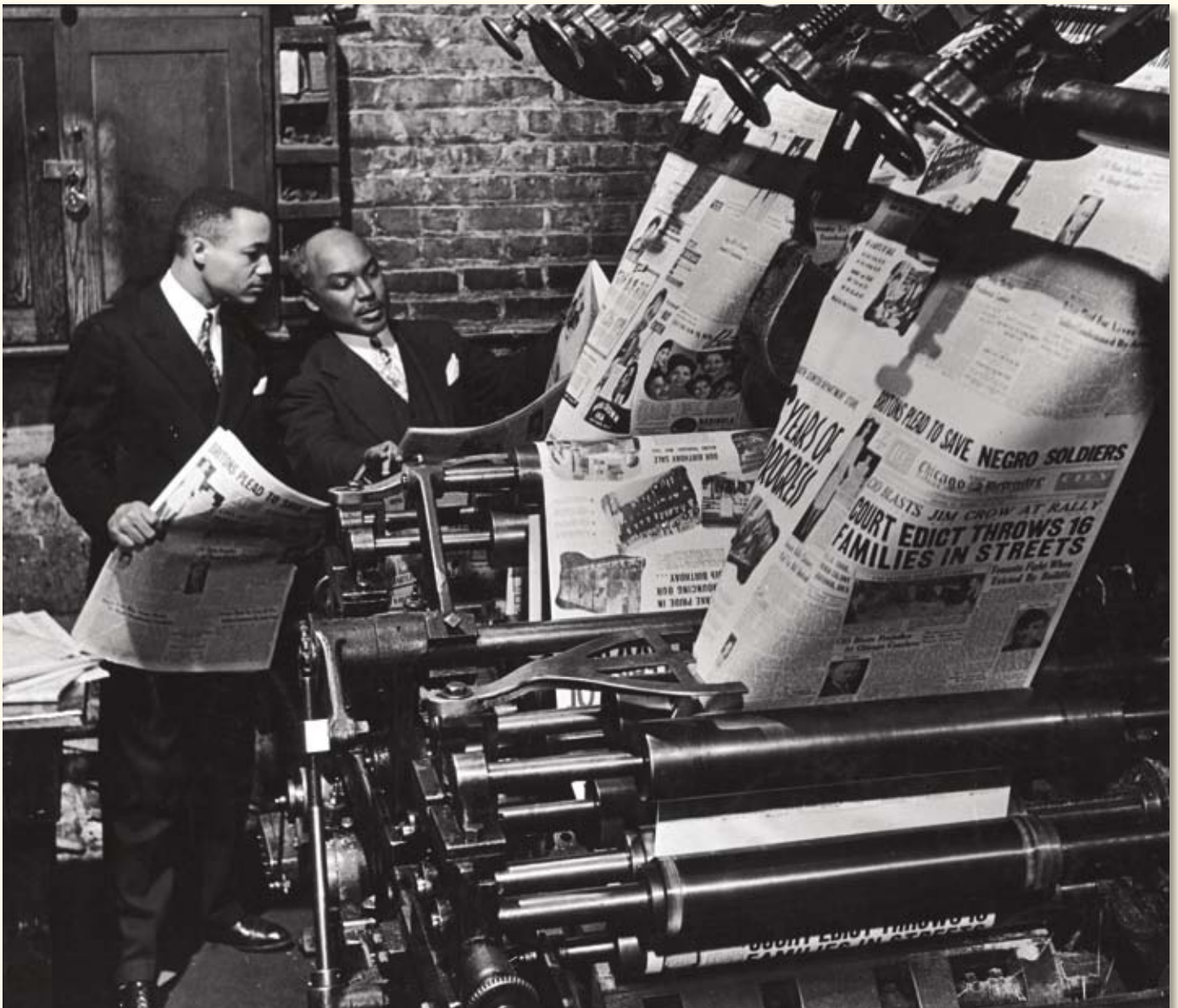
I have grappled with issues of race throughout my career; at the outset I wondered if my race would prevent me from becoming a journalist at all, and I later struggled with the black community's expectations about how I should conduct my work. President Obama bears the burden of even greater expectations. As the first black president, many view him as the embodiment of the change our civil rights leaders worked so hard to achieve. Viewed through this prism, his successes and failures are always magnified. But my professional successes and his are a testament to America; as President-elect Obama noted on the evening he was elected, "... that is the true genius of America — that America can change. Our union can be perfected. And what we have already achieved gives us hope for what we can and must achieve tomorrow." ❁

Juan Williams, a leading political commentator for television and radio, is author of a ground-breaking work on the civil rights movement, Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965; a biography of the first black Supreme Court justice, Thurgood Marshall: American Revolutionary and This Far by Faith: Stories from the African-American Religious Experience, a history of the black religious experience in the United States, among other books. He was a senior correspondent for National Public Radio and is a political analyst for the Fox News Channel. His many awards include a prestigious Emmy Award for TV documentary writing.

BLACK MEDIA TIMELINE

FREEDOM'S MESSAGE

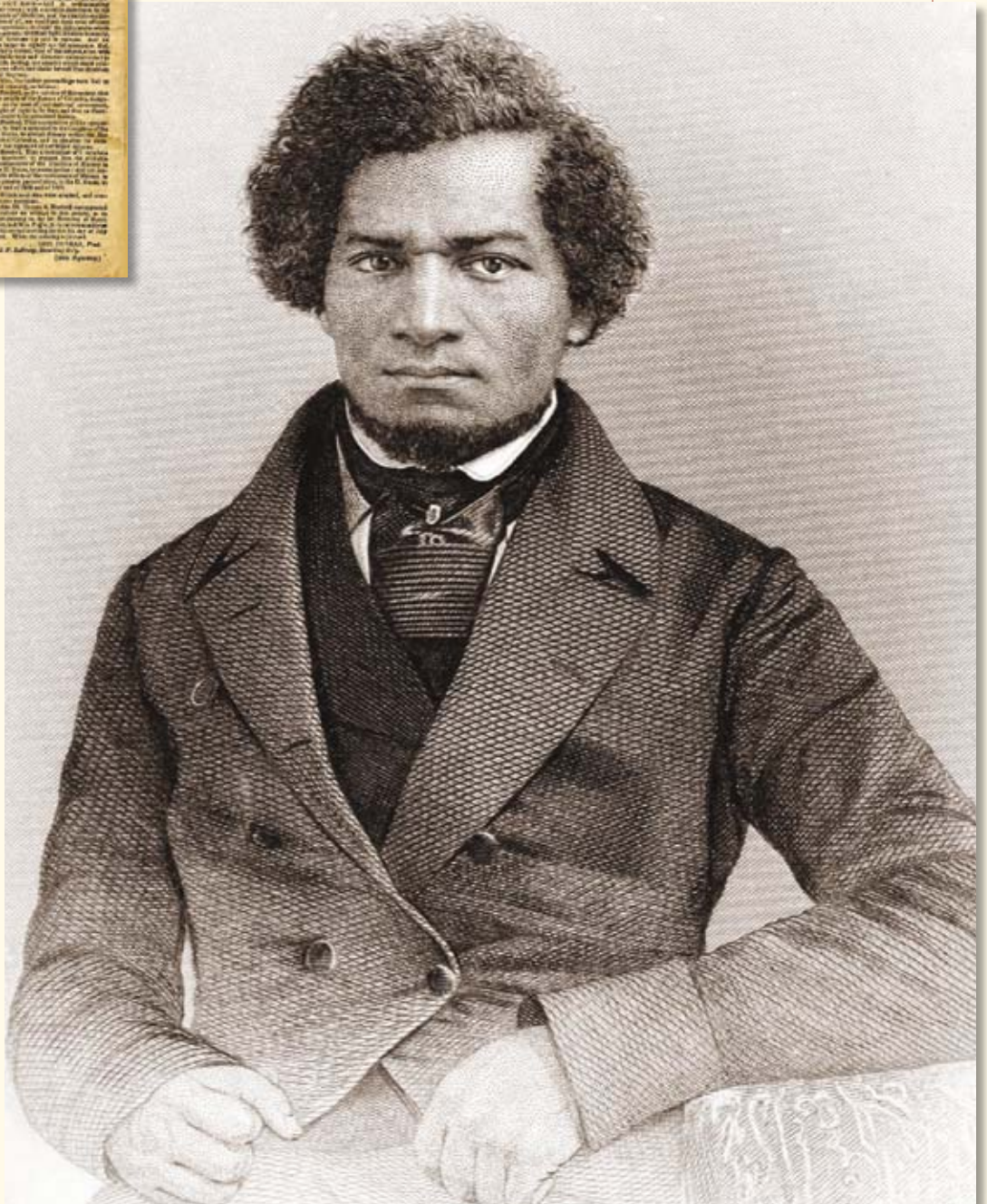
In most southern states, teaching slaves to read was a crime punishable by fines, whipping or imprisonment. Yet some white people taught slaves to read and write, and literate slaves taught others. By 1827 there were enough literate slaves and freedmen to warrant the publication of a newspaper owned and operated by African Americans, *Freedom's Journal*. Numerous publications followed, which became critical catalysts for slavery's abolition, equality and civil rights.



Chicago Defender founder Robert S. Abbott checks a print run, 1943.



Freedom's Journal, the first newspaper owned, operated and edited by African Americans, was founded in New York City in 1827 by editors Samuel E. Cornish and John B. Russwurm. It ran until 1829, when Russwurm, a supporter of return migration to Africa, departed for Liberia. Cornish renamed the paper *Rights for All*. Cornish, a Presbyterian minister and co-founder of the American Anti-Slavery Society, was a leading black editor of his day.



Slave narratives, such as the autobiography of abolitionist Frederick Douglass, were an important genre of early African-American writing that informed the public of the plight of slaves. Douglass also published an influential anti-slavery newspaper, the *North Star*, from 1847 until, renamed *Frederick Douglass' Paper* in 1851, it closed in 1860. In it he championed minorities' and women's rights: "Right is of no sex — truth is no color — God is the father of us all and we are all brethren," he wrote.



Mary Ann Shadd Cary, the first black woman journalist in North America, moved to Canada for a time, founding *Provincial Freedom* (1853-1887) to support equality and education for blacks. The more famous Ida B. Wells-Barnett followed in this activist-journalist tradition, as did Harriet Jacobs, whose autobiographical *Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) was influential. In the 20th century, Daisy Bates reported on the civil rights struggle, publishing a black newspaper, the *Arkansas State Press*, with her husband, Lucious Christopher Bates.

Two African-American weeklies called the *Colored American* appeared in the 19th century: one, originally the *Weekly Advocate*, was published by Samuel Cornish, Philip Bell and Charles Bennett Ray in New York City (1837-1842). Later, a Washington paper (1893-1904) was edited by Edward Elder Cooper. Bell later edited two influential papers in San Francisco, California, the *Pacific Appeal* (1862-1880) and the *Elevator* (1865-1898).

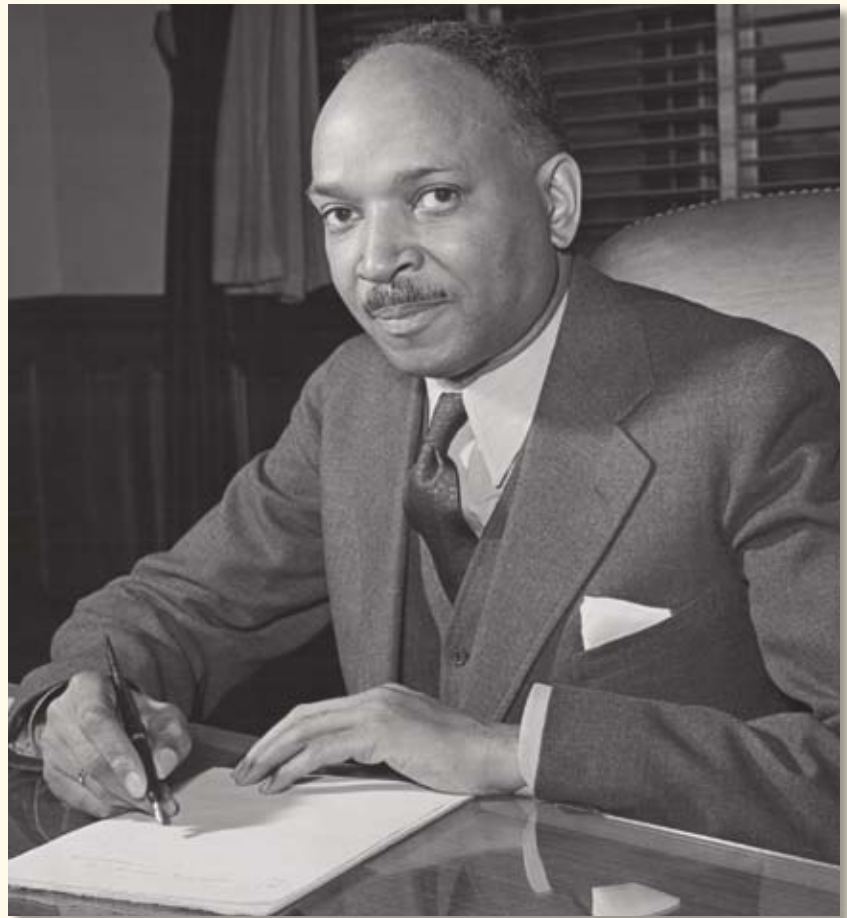




Begun by Robert S. Abbott as a handbill in 1905, the *Chicago Defender* soon became a paper of national standing. It influenced many Southern blacks to migrate to northern urban centers for jobs. Writers included Langston Hughes, Walter White and Gwendolyn Brooks. Under the direction of Abbott's nephew, John Sengstacke, in 1956 it became the world's largest black-run daily. The *Defender's* sensational headlines and graphic images chronicled abuses of black Americans and supported the campaign for civil rights.

A newspaper boy sells the *Chicago Defender* in 1942.

Claude Barnett founded the Associated Negro Press (ANP) wire service in 1919 and steered it to success nationally and internationally until his poor health led to its closing in 1964. In 1941 John Sengstacke, *Chicago Defender* publisher, established the National Negro Publishers Association, now the National Newspaper Publishers Association, which today links more than 200 black publications and provides an electronic news service through its BlackPressUSA.com Web site.



John H. Johnson started the *Negro Digest* in 1942, and it quickly gained a large circulation. But *Ebony*, which he founded in 1945, built his empire. It remains the Johnson Publishing Company's flagship publication. In 1951 he started *Jet*, a weekly news digest. Johnson was committed to serving an exclusively black readership, and became the first black media millionaire. See "John H. Johnson: Media Mogul" on page 47.



The first television station operated by and for African Americans went on the air in 1975, but was short-lived. In 1980 Robert L. Johnson started Black Entertainment Television (BET), a cable television network that succeeded by appealing to youth with music videos and entertainment.

BET executive producer Mara Akil laughs with colleagues on the set of the show *Girlfriends*.

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BlackPressUSA.com, an online newswire, is a collaboration of the National Newspaper Publishers Association and Howard University. It delivers news digitally to African-American media, as the Associated Negro Press wire service once did on paper. It is one of many black-oriented new media and social networking Web sites that are changing the face of journalism and communications.



"I was a geek but now aspire to work," blogged Omar Wasow, after leaving BlackPlanet.com, which he started in 1999. It became a hugely popular African-American social networking site and was acquired in 2008 by African-American media entrepreneur Cathy Hughes, founder/owner of Radio One and TV One, a successful black lifestyle cable channel. The black press, like mainstream journalism, increasingly uses all media platforms, ranging from print to digital to SMS (short message service, or text messaging).

Richard Allen

BLACK FOUNDING FATHER

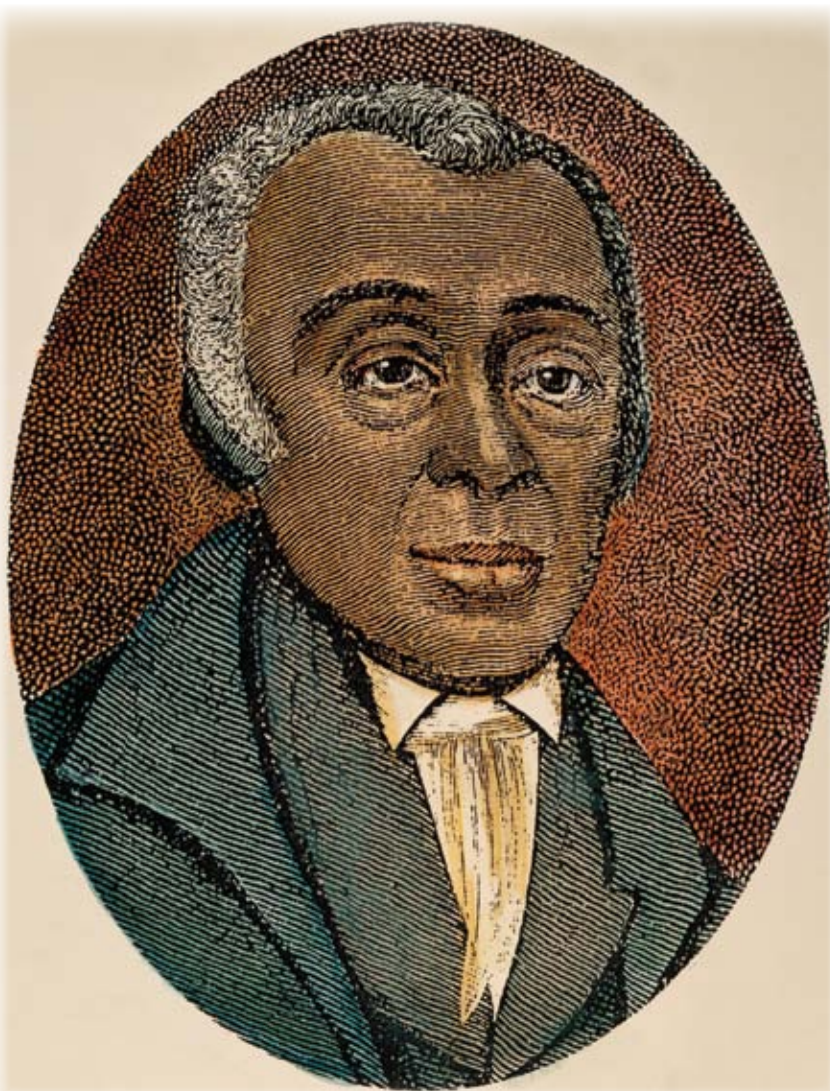
by **Richard Newman**

Richard Allen (1760–1831) has remained a heroic figure to African Americans through the generations. He was a man of many firsts: the first black author to gain a copyright, the first black bishop in the United States and the first black person to eulogize an American president. Perhaps most notably, Allen founded one of the most revered institutions in the African-American community: the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. “There is one man whom our people should never forget,” Philadelphia’s Bishop A.M. Wyman proclaimed in February 1865, referring to Allen after he had long since passed. Generations of African Americans would lionize Allen as one of their first and greatest leaders.

Allen was active during the founding era of U.S. history, a time when icons like George Washington, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson — early U.S. presidents who are often referred to as the nation’s Founding Fathers — towered over American politics and shaped the country’s culture for centuries to come. He was part of a remarkable generation of black men and women, dubbed “Black Founders” by

recent scholars, who sought to expand liberty during the early American republic. These African-American

leaders included Absalom Jones, James Forten, Phillis Wheatley, Peter Williams, Lemuel Haynes and Prince



Richard Allen founded the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in 1794.



Hall. The Black Founders believed not only in uplifting people of color but redeeming the nation from the scourge of slavery, as well. They sought to introduce ideals of racial justice to American society. In no small way, their prescient vision of the United States — a polity proud of its diversity — is the nation's public face to the world today.

From Bondage to Boycotts

Born into slavery on February 14, 1760, Allen lived as the property of another man for the first third of his life. As a teenager, Allen once broke down in tears at the thought of a life in bondage — and he vowed to liberate himself one day from servitude. After attending Methodist revivals as a teenager, Allen became a Methodist. Methodists were initially a dissenting faith within the Anglican Church and soon became one of the fastest-growing denominations

because their democratic ethos appealed to marginalized people. Many Methodists were against slavery and the church's stance attracted waves of black converts.

Aware of the denomination's abolitionist position, Allen shrewdly invited a Methodist preacher to his master's home one day. "Thou art weighed in the balance and found wanting," the minister grimly intoned to Allen's master, compelling him to agree on the spot to let Allen purchase his freedom. Allen managed to pay off his debt early and by 1783, the year the United States signed a peace treaty with Great Britain ending the Revolutionary War, he was a free man.

Over the next several decades, Allen attempted to build a reform movement capable of smashing racial inequality. In the process, he assumed roles as a religious leader, publicist and community organizer. Tenacious

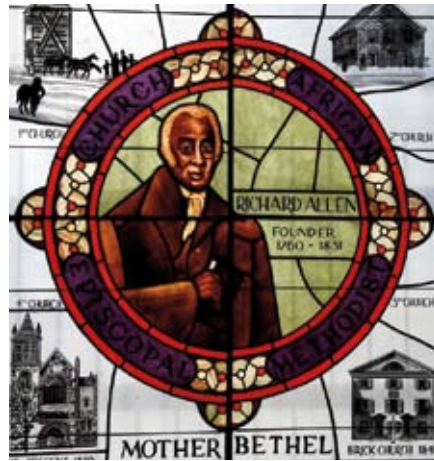
An 1804 engraving depicts the Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church in Philadelphia, which replaced the renovated blacksmith shop where Allen began the church.

and determined, any resistance he encountered only fueled Allen's sense of mission. For example, soon after moving to Philadelphia to minister to black congregants at St. George's Methodist Church, Allen staged a daring protest against segregation within the house of the Lord. Although black congregants regularly contributed to the church's coffers, allowing it to flourish, they were asked to sit in segregated seating areas — indeed in a second-floor gallery at the back of the church, built expressly to keep blacks out of sight. Rather than capitulate to unequal treatment, a furious Allen organized a nonviolent protest to register black congregants' disagreement with the



policy. During a subsequent Sunday service, Allen led African-American congregants into the main pews to pray among the whites. When white-dominated church leadership demanded that black congregants return to the segregated sections, Allen responded by marching black parishioners straight out of the church. “And we never entered it again!” he proudly recalled. These brave congregants broke with white leadership and established Bethel Church, one of the first autonomous African-American churches in the United States. Bethel eventually became part of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) denomination, formed in 1816, which today boasts more than 2 million members in more than 30 nations.

Allen’s activism put white leaders on notice that African Americans would challenge not only slavery, but racism. In the 1780s, many white citizens still pondered whether emancipation also connoted racial equality. Some northern



The modern Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church, in the same location as the original, was dedicated in 1890. Its interior (above) is embellished with fine stained glass windows, such as the one pictured that memorializes founder Richard Allen.

states, like Pennsylvania, passed gradual abolition laws in their transition from slave-holding to free states. But African Americans still routinely faced discrimination, even in northern schools and workplaces, although slavery had become illegal in much of the North by the time of the American Civil War. Further south, however, even delayed freedom was too radical for many. In Virginia, by the beginning of the 19th century, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison both supported the establishment of a separate homeland (most likely in Africa) for African Americans that would obviate the need for racial integration in the United States. Jefferson even believed that African Americans had failed to develop any art, culture or literature that would make their race worthy of U.S. citizenship. According to many white leaders in both the North and South, the United States was — and should remain — a white republic.

Allen combated this notion in two key ways. First, he sought to develop black-run institutions (churches, schools, benevolent societies) that proved that African Americans were indeed fit for freedom. The Free African Society, founded in 1787, was the first mutual aid group created by free blacks in Philadelphia. Nearly 20 years later, Allen helped to found a seminary for the training of promising black preachers.

Allen's second response to racial injustice was to cultivate black voices in the public sphere. During the 1790s, he joined efforts to petition the U.S. Congress to abolish slavery. He also published a variety of protest pamphlets. Like slave narrators and subsequent black newspaper publishers, Allen realized that literary activism could influence the American public to embrace the cause of racial justice. In 1794, he and Absalom Jones published *A Narrative of the Black People During the Late Awful Calamity in Philadelphia*, a scathing attack on white racism following Philadelphia's catastrophic yellow fever epidemic.

The deadly disease had afflicted the city throughout the fall of 1793, killing more than 4,000 people — roughly a tenth of the total population. The majority of whites who had the means to flee did so, temporarily shifting the city's racial balance in favor of blacks, most of whom were too poor to escape. Both out of a sincere concern for their fellow residents, as well as a desire to prove themselves worthy of the respect of their neighbors, many of Philadelphia's African Americans offered their services during the crisis. Recruited to fill the vacuum created by fleeing whites, African Americans nursed the sick, cleaned their homes, dug graves and buried bodies — sometimes at their own expense and at times to dire consequence, such as contracting the disease themselves. Once the crisis had passed, however, ugly racial attitudes

returned. Despite the courageous and generous efforts of African Americans, some whites still managed to belittle their contributions, accusing black aid workers of taking advantage of vulnerable whites and demanding the same wages that white workers were typically paid. Jones and Allen's pamphlet voiced the frustration and injustice felt by Philadelphia's African-American community and eloquently exposed the racism that flourished in the wake of the epidemic. Furthermore, Allen used the pamphlet as an opportunity to lobby lawmakers to join the abolitionist cause. "If you love your children, if you love your country, if you love the God of love," wrote Allen, "clear your hands from slaves, burden not your children or country with them."

A few years later, Allen again pushed his way into the American consciousness when he eulogized President George Washington. Allen ingeniously used a federal funeral march through Philadelphia in December 1799 to claim that the nation's first president — arguably the most revered man in America — was an abolitionist. No other eulogist at the time remarked on the antislavery message of Washington's last will and testament (that mandated the emancipation of his slaves following the death of his wife, Martha). Allen, however, took the opportunity to hail the president's posthumous action as a boon to the abolitionist cause. Andrew Brown, editor of the *Philadelphia Gazette*, published Allen's speech, claiming that Allen's eloquent eulogy proved that blacks were indeed capable of being full citizens. Newspapers in New York City and Baltimore reprinted the eulogy, giving Allen great hope that Americans would soon destroy bondage and racial inequality.

But when slavery continued to grow and spread during the early 1800s, Allen began to express doubts about the future of blacks in America.

During the last 15 years of his life, Allen flirted with colonization schemes that aimed to bring African Americans to West Africa, Haiti and British Canada. Nevertheless, Allen refused to relinquish his fight for racial equality on American soil. In 1827, he called on African Americans to intensify the struggle for justice by reclaiming the United States as a black homeland. "This land, which we have watered with our tears and our blood," he wrote, "is now our Mother Country." His autobiography, dictated to his son and published posthumously in 1833, detailed Allen's long struggle for justice.

Perhaps Frederick Douglass, a contemporary of Allen's, best communicated Allen's significance to U.S. history when he noted that Allen had envisioned a new Declaration of Independence, one in which the famous line, "All men are created equal" truly applied to all of the nation's inhabitants, regardless of race. ❁

*Richard S. Newman is professor of history at Rochester Institute of Technology, where he specializes in the study of the abolitionist movement and African-American reformers. He is the author of *Freedom's Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church and the Black Founding Fathers* and *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic*. In addition to his scholarly endeavors, Professor Newman serves on the advisory boards of institutions dedicated to educational outreach, including the Gilder Lehrman Center at Yale University.*

Marshall Taylor

CYCLING CHAMPION

by **Brian Heyman**

The riders were drenched in sweat as they pumped their pedals hard and sped toward the finish line at Queen's Park

Velodrome in Montreal, Canada. It was August and four men chased victory in the one-mile sprint of the World Cycling Championships. Suddenly, 20-year-old Marshall W. "Major" Taylor edged out in front of his competitors, thrilling the crowds in the stands. Taylor sailed across the finish line in first place and rode a victory lap around the stadium as cheers washed over the young champion. "My national anthem took on new meaning for me," Taylor later wrote in his autobiography, *The Fastest Bicycle Rider in the World*. "I never felt so proud to be an American before, and indeed I felt even more American at that moment than I had ever felt in America."

The year was 1899 and it was not an easy time to be an African American in the United States. While the 13th and 14th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution had emancipated slaves and made them citizens entitled to equal protection under the law more than three decades prior, prejudice and poverty still circumscribed the lives of many African Americans.



This portrait of Marshall "Major" Taylor was on the cover of his 1928 autobiography.

Taylor challenged the racism of his time to succeed as an elite cyclist on the national and international scenes,

despite the added challenge of being an African American in a sport dominated by whites. Amazingly, Taylor navigated



Taylor was an elite athlete who became the first black world champion cyclist.

past the prejudice of his fellow riders, sports officials and promoters to become the first black world champion cyclist — and the second black athlete ever to win a global title. Roughly half a century before baseball legend Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier as the first African-American athlete to play major league baseball, Taylor regularly competed against white athletes in pursuit of championship titles. As

the first African-American cyclist to compete professionally on a regular basis, Taylor was a must-see attraction for Americans of all backgrounds. To African Americans, in particular, Taylor was a role model and symbol of what was possible to achieve in the United States in spite of racial prejudice. Taylor was also a beloved sports hero abroad, especially in France and Australia.

Taylor was born on November 26, 1878, in the state of Indiana. His father was a farmer who had served in the American Civil War and later worked as a carriage driver for a wealthy white family in Indianapolis. When Taylor was a child, his father occasionally brought him along to work. The employer's family had a son the same age as Taylor and the two boys became close friends. In fact, Taylor later moved in with the family of his father's employer, an arrangement that gave Taylor a better life than his struggling parents could provide. Among the other material advantages of life with the family, Taylor was given a bicycle just like the other neighborhood kids. Taylor taught himself some bike tricks, which caught the attention of local bike store owner Tom Hay. Soon, Hay asked Taylor to hold an exhibition outside the store to attract customers.

Taylor's knack for gathering a crowd led to a job offer at Hay's shop. The compensation was \$6 a week, plus a free bike worth \$35. In addition to cleaning the shop, Taylor put on a daily show in front of the store. Taylor began dressing up to attract more spectators, eventually settling on a soldier's uniform as his performing outfit. This earned him the nickname "Major." While working at Hay's bike shop, Taylor had long admired the gold medal on display that awaited the winner of the annual store-sponsored road race that was contested by the best amateur cyclists in the state. When the competition rolled around, Taylor attended — intending only to watch — but his boss, Hay, convinced him to compete. Once he was on the road, there was no stopping Taylor. Halfway through the 10-mile race, the young rider pulled a mile ahead! Spurred on by dreams of owning the medal he had coveted in the shop window, Taylor won the first cycling race he ever entered.



From there, Taylor's interest in competition grew. When he was about 15, Taylor caught the eye of Louis "Birdie" Munger, a former competitive cyclist who had started manufacturing bicycles for a living. Munger took Taylor under his wing, employing and mentoring him over the next several years. Through Munger, Taylor met some of the biggest names in the bicycle industry, including American cycling champ Arthur Zimmerman. "I'm going to make a champion out of that boy someday," Munger vowed to Zimmerman.

In 1895, Munger moved his operations to the city of Worcester, Massachusetts, and Taylor followed. The next winter, Taylor rode his first professional race. He was just 18 years old. The race was a half-mile preliminary event at Madison Square Garden, the biggest sports arena in New York City. Taylor sped to victory in the preliminary event and placed eighth in the main competition, a grueling six-day race at the Garden.

As Taylor enjoyed more and more athletic success, some white riders

started to resent competing against (and losing to) an African American. At times, Taylor's white competitors banded together to prevent him from competing on a technicality. Or, failing to disqualify Taylor, they shouted demoralizing insults at him. Sometimes they physically ganged up on him, such as forming a pocket around him on the track to contain him during a race. In one instance, after Taylor finished second in a race in Boston, the white third-place rider threw Taylor off his bike and choked him, causing Taylor to lose consciousness for 15 minutes.

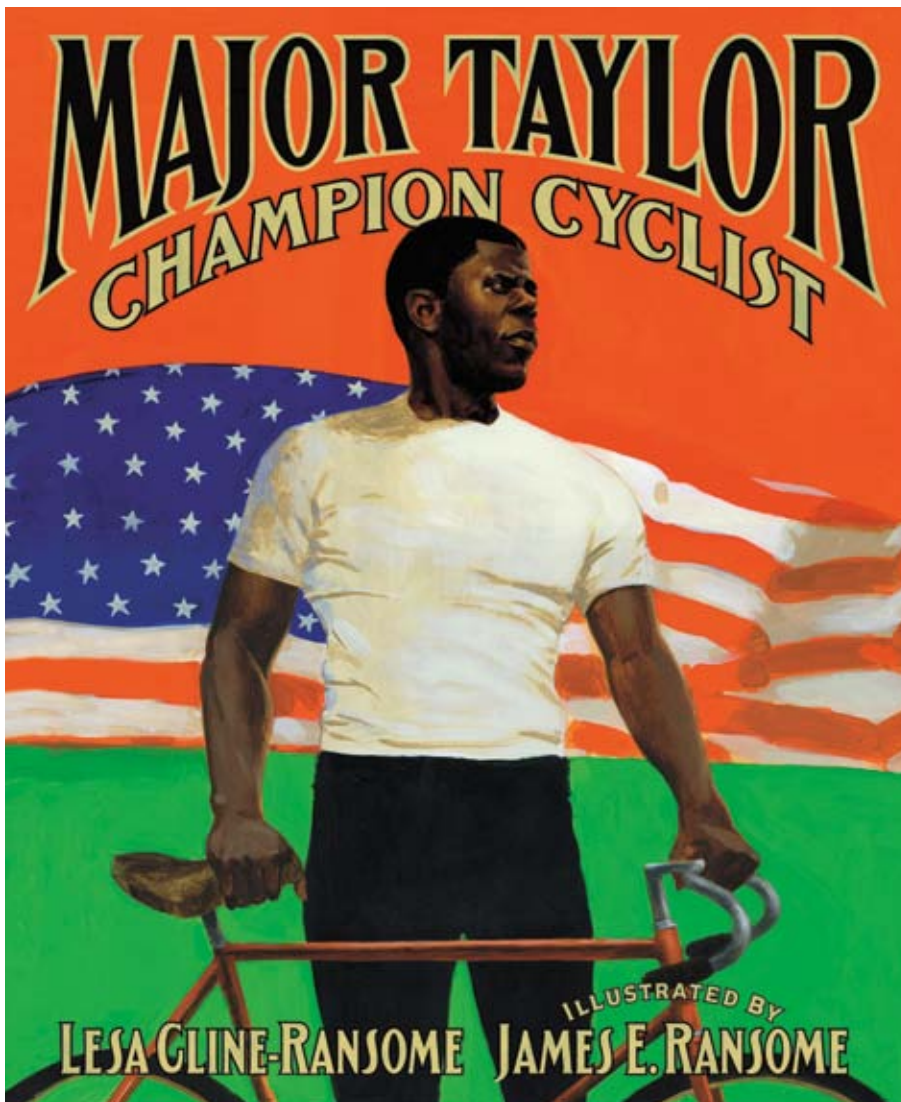
Taylor suffered other forms of racism on the road as well. Some hotels denied him lodging and certain restaurants refused to serve him. To his credit, Taylor persevered without succumbing to bitterness. Despite the mean-spirited behavior of his competitors and the racial prejudice of his time, Taylor retained a firm belief in fair play and still managed to best the other riders. In his autobiography, Taylor wrote: "A real honest-to-goodness champion can always win on the merits." Besides good sportsmanship, Taylor

Taylor leads in a race at the Buffalo Velodrome, Paris, 1908. He made six tours to Europe, and won particular acclaim in France. Here he bests champions Gabriel Poulain (France), Thorwald Ellegaard (Denmark) and Emil Friol (France).

Opposite page: A children's book illustrated by James E. Ransome tells Taylor's story to young readers.

practiced clean living — no drinking, no smoking, no drugs. He was also a devout Christian. Until the twilight of his career, Taylor refused to race on Sundays out of respect for his Baptist faith. This religious commitment (as well as his weariness with race-related complications that burdened previous competitions) cost him a national points title in 1898 because he refused to compete in the Sunday race, after having been shut out the previous year by racist southern promoters who refused to let him participate.

By the end of 1898, Taylor had set seven world records and went on to claim both national and international championship titles the following year. After winning another national sprint



championship in 1900, he competed for the first time in Europe the following year. In Paris, Taylor was treated like a celebrity: Foreign crowds feted him and he beat several European champions on that tour alone. The reception was just as warm in 1903 when Taylor competed in Australia. There, roughly 30,000 fans came to watch him race one event.

After a challenging second Australian tour, Taylor returned home to Massachusetts. But soon after arriving back in the States, he collapsed from the physical and mental strain of elite competition and the relentless prejudice that had accompanied it. By 1910, Taylor had had his fill of the sporting life. He was only 32 years old,

but the stress of professional athletics had taken its toll. "In most of my races I not only struggled for victory but also for my very life and limb," Taylor confessed in his autobiography. "Only my dauntless courage and the indomitable fighting spirit I possessed allowed me to carry on in the face of tremendous odds."

Sadly, Taylor saw no relief in retirement. His business ventures failed, causing him to lose money and eventually his house. Taylor became estranged from his wife and daughter and, in 1930, he moved into a Chicago YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association). From there, he tried to peddle copies of his autobiography

to eke out a living. Two years later, weakened by a complex of health problems, Taylor died penniless and alone in the charity section of a local hospital. He was initially buried in the pauper's section of the local cemetery, with no marker commemorating his life and pioneering athletic achievements.

Years later, however, a group of professional cyclists familiar with Taylor's story joined forces with the head of a bicycle company to bury him with proper honors. The plaque that these athletes inscribed on the gravestone of the man who had inspired so many in his day captured the essence of Marshall Taylor, sports hero:

"World's champion bicycle racer who came up the hard way without hatred in his heart, an honest, courageous and god-fearing, clean-living, gentlemanly athlete. A credit to his race who always gave out his best. Gone but not forgotten." ♣

Brian Heyman has been a sportswriter in the New York city area for 27 years, earning numerous national and regional journalism awards. He is a staff writer for the Journal News, a Gannett daily newspaper based in White Plains, New York, and freelances for the New York Times and the Associated Press. He grew up in Ossining, New York, and graduated magna cum laude with a degree in communications from Ithaca College in Ithaca, New York.

Madam C.J. Walker

BUSINESS SAVVY TO PHILANTHROPY

by **A'Lelia Bundles**

Little more than a century ago, when entrepreneur Madam C.J. Walker founded her hair care and cosmetics empire, few women dared to imagine owning a business. During an era when American women were denied the right to vote and most African Americans were excluded — by law and by custom — from the nation's most prestigious universities, corporations, professions and government positions, Madam Walker transformed herself from an uneducated laundress into a corporate executive — and one of the country's earliest self-made female millionaires. At a time when most American women who worked outside the home were factory or domestic workers, Walker led an international sales force of thousands of financially independent African-American women. Her unlikely journey as a businesswoman, philanthropist and political activist remains an inspiration and an example of what one woman with courage, perseverance and a generous spirit can accomplish.

Born Sarah Breedlove in Delta, Louisiana, in December 1867, she was the first of her five siblings to begin life as a free person. As a young child Sarah



Madam C.J. Walker was the first African-American millionaire.

worked beside her parents, Owen and Minerva Breedlove, in the same cotton plantation fields where they had been

enslaved until the end of the American Civil War. Sadly, when Sarah was seven years old, both her parents died.

With no schools for black children in her community and no job prospects, she married a man named Moses McWilliams when she was just 14 years old. By the age of 20, Sarah was a widow with a young child.

Unable to support herself and her daughter, Lelia, she joined her older brothers in St. Louis, Missouri. Sarah obtained a job as a laundress, earning barely over a dollar a week, but she was determined that her daughter receive more formal education than she had. While many people looked down on washerwomen like Sarah, she refused to be ashamed of menial, but honest, work. She did admit, however, that she was embarrassed by one aspect of her personal appearance: the severe scalp disease that was causing her to lose her hair. During the early 1900s, when most Americans lacked indoor plumbing and electricity, bathing was a luxury. As a

result, Sarah and many other women were going bald because they washed their hair so infrequently, leaving it vulnerable to environmental hazards such as pollution, bacteria and lice. To cure her condition, she experimented with formulas until she discovered an ointment and a cleansing regimen that healed her scalp and allowed her hair to grow. She began selling her salves and teaching other women to groom and style their hair.

Around this time Sarah met and married Charles Joseph Walker, a newspaper salesman, who helped her market and advertise her products. It was after their marriage in 1906 that Sarah Breedlove began calling herself “Madam” C.J. Walker, a title of dignity and respect borrowed from the women who had created the French cosmetics and fashion industries. In 1910 Walker moved to Indianapolis, Indiana, where

she built a factory, hair salon and beauty school to train her sales agents. She also became involved in the city’s civic, cultural and political activities. Learning of a campaign to construct a YMCA (Young Men’s Christian Association) facility in the black community, she pledged \$1,000 to the building fund. Her donation shocked her new neighbors because no black woman ever had contributed such a large sum to an organization like the YMCA. The laundress who once had made \$1.50 a week now was earning enough money to help others.

Bolstered by the positive response to her gift, she set another goal for herself: to address the delegates of the 1912 National Negro Business League (NNBL) convention. Arriving in Chicago with soaring confidence, she tried to share her rags-to-riches story with NNBL founder Booker



Madam C.J. Walker (second from left) and educator, author and political leader Booker T. Washington (center left), among others, at the 1913 dedication of the Senate Avenue black YMCA in Indianapolis, Indiana.



Top: Walker drives her niece Anjetta Breedlove (in front) and two employees in a Model-T Ford, circa 1912.

Left: A 1917 magazine advertisement displays the beauty preparations that made Walker wealthy.

Above: Employees and sales agents of the Madam C. J. Walker Manufacturing Company gathered for a convention at Villa Lewaro, Walker's estate in Irvington-on-Hudson, New York, not far from the estate of oil magnate John D. Rockefeller, in 1924.

T. Washington, a figure of national stature and arguably the most powerful African-American leader of the era. For two days of the convention, he ignored her overture. Undaunted, Walker waited patiently until the final day of the conference, at which point she stood from her seat and addressed Washington as he presided at the podium: "Surely you are not going to shut the door in my face. I am a woman who came from the cotton fields of the South," Walker said. "I was promoted to the washtub. From there I was promoted to the kitchen. And from there I promoted myself into the business of manufacturing hair goods and preparations. I have built my own factory on my own ground!"

Washington was so shocked and annoyed that he still did not invite Walker to the stage, but he could no longer ignore her. The following year, Washington accepted Walker's invitation to be a guest in her Indianapolis home during the dedication of the new YMCA. Walker also contributed to the Tuskegee Institute (a school founded by Washington in 1881 for the advancement of African Americans), funding scholarships she created for African students there, which helped her further earn Washington's respect. At the 1913 NNBL convention Washington graciously welcomed Walker as one of several keynote speakers.

Walker continued to expand her market and ventured beyond the United States to Cuba, Jamaica, Haiti, Panama and Costa Rica. She hoped that — through the principles of entrepreneurship that had made her wealthy — her products could provide prosperity for women of African descent all over the world. While she traveled, her daughter, Lelia, set to work opening another school and salon in an expensively decorated townhouse in New York

City's predominantly African-American Harlem neighborhood. As the Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company continued to grow, Walker and her daughter organized their sales force into local and state clubs. Her Walker Hair Culturists Union of America convention in Philadelphia in 1917 drew 200 agents and became one of the first national meetings of American women gathered to discuss business and commerce. At the convention Walker happily listened to stories from former maids, cooks, sharecroppers and school teachers who now made more money than their former employers. As a reward, she gave prizes not only to the women who had sold the most products, but to the women who had contributed the most to charity in their communities.

The next year, Walker moved into Villa Lewaro, a lavish estate in affluent Irvington-on-Hudson, New York, not far from the homes of oil mogul cum philanthropist John D. Rockefeller and railroad baron Jay Gould (two of the richest men in U.S. history). With New York as her base, she became even more involved in political matters, joining the executive committee of the Silent Protest Parade, a July 1917 public demonstration in which more than 8,000 African Americans marched up Fifth Avenue to protest an east St. Louis riot that had left 39 black men, women and children dead. A few days later, she and a group of Harlem leaders visited the White House to urge President Woodrow Wilson to support legislation to make lynching a federal crime.

Just before she died in May 1919, Walker pledged \$5,000 — equivalent to about \$65,000 in today's dollars — to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's anti-lynching fund. At the time, it was the largest gift that the civil rights organization ever had received. She also revised her will to reflect her passion for education, children and the elderly by

directing two-thirds of future net profits of her estate to charity and bequeathing nearly \$100,000 to individuals, educational institutions and orphanages.

Today her legacy is best preserved in the aspirations of those who are inspired by her entrepreneurial success and philanthropic generosity, such as billionaire businesswoman Oprah Winfrey and U.S. Small Business Administration Deputy Director Marie Johns. In 1992 Walker was one of only 21 women inducted into the National Business Hall of Fame at the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago.

Whenever people asked Madam Walker the secret to her success, she would proudly tell them: "There is no royal flower-strewn path to success, and if there is, I have not found it, for whatever success I have attained has been the result of much hard work and many sleepless nights. I got my start by giving myself a start. So don't sit down and wait for the opportunities to come. You have to get up and make them for yourselves!" ❀

A'Lelia Bundles, a former ABC News producer and executive, is Madam C.J. Walker's biographer and great-great-granddaughter. Bundles' book, On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker (Scribner), was a 2001 New York Times Notable Book. She lives in Washington, D.C.

Ida B. Wells-Barnett

FIGHTING AND WRITING FOR JUSTICE

by Lee D. Baker

Ida B. Wells-Barnett was a fearless anti-lynching crusader, suffragist, women's rights advocate, journalist and speaker of international stature. She stands as one of our nation's most uncompromising leaders and most ardent defenders of democracy. She was born in Holly Springs, Mississippi, in 1862 and died in Chicago, Illinois, in 1931 at the age of 69.

Although enslaved prior to the Civil War, Ida's parents were able to support their seven children because her mother was a well-known cook and her father a skilled carpenter. When Ida was only 14, a tragic epidemic of yellow fever swept through Holly Springs and killed her parents and youngest sibling. Emblematic of the righteousness, responsibility and fortitude that characterized her life, Ida kept the family together by securing a job as a teacher. She managed to continue her education by attending nearby Rust College, and eventually moved to Memphis, Tennessee, to live with her aunt and help raise her youngest sisters.

It was in Memphis where she first began to fight for racial and gender justice. In 1884, she was asked by the conductor of the Chesapeake & Ohio



Ida B. Wells-Barnett was a journalist and activist for equal rights.

Railroad Company to give up her seat on the train to a white man. The conductor ordered her into the smoking

car that doubled as the "Jim Crow" car (a term for laws that segregated people by race), which was already crowded



Ida B. Wells-Barnett had four children with her husband, F.L. Barnett, a fellow newspaper editor.

with other riders. Despite the 1875 Civil Rights Act banning discrimination on the basis of race, creed, or color in theaters, hotels, transports, and other public accommodations, several railroad

companies defied the law and continued to segregate their passengers.

Wells refused to budge, citing her status as a lady and a non-smoker who therefore belonged in the ladies'

car, rather than the less-comfortable one reserved for African Americans. Deaf to her objections, the conductor forcibly removed Wells from the train — to the applause of white passengers. When Wells returned to Memphis, she immediately hired an attorney and sued the railroad for mistreatment. She won her case in local court but the railroad company appealed to the Supreme Court of Tennessee, and it reversed the lower court's ruling. This was the first of many struggles for social justice and human dignity in which Wells engaged over her lifetime. From that moment forward, Wells worked tirelessly and fearlessly to fight gender and race-based injustice and violence.

Wells' suit against the railroad company also sparked her career as a journalist. Many newspapers wanted to hear about the experiences of the 25-year-old school teacher who stood up against white supremacy. Her writing career blossomed in publications geared to African-American and Christian audiences, as well as British newspapers. In 1889 Wells became a partner in the *Free Speech and Headlight*, a newspaper owned by the pastor of the Beale Street Baptist Church, Reverend R. Nightingale. Rev. Nightingale encouraged his large African-American congregation to subscribe to the paper and, as a result, the publication flourished. This enabled Wells to leave her teaching job and support herself as a writer, editor and speaker both in the United States and abroad.

Tragedy struck Wells' life again in 1892 when three of her friends were lynched. Their names were Thomas Moss, Calvin McDowell and Henry Stewart. The three men were owners of the People's Grocery Company and some felt that their store had diverted customers from competing white-owned businesses. In response, a group of angry white men tried to eliminate the competition by attacking the



People's Grocery but the owners fought back, shooting one of the attackers. The owners of People's Grocery were arrested but before long a lynch-mob broke into the jail in which they were being held. The mob dragged the incarcerated men out of town and brutally murdered all three. This atrocity catalyzed Wells' outrage. She wrote in the *Free Speech*:

The city of Memphis has demonstrated that neither character nor standing avails the Negro if he dares to protect himself against the white man or become his rival. There is nothing we can do about the lynching now, as we are out-numbered and without arms. The white mob could help itself to ammunition without pay, but the order is rigidly enforced against

the selling of guns to Negroes. There is therefore only one thing left to do; save our money and leave a town which will neither protect our lives and property, nor give us a fair trial in the courts, but takes us out and murders us in cold blood when accused by white persons.

Many people took the advice Wells penned in her paper and left town. Other members of the black community organized a boycott of white-owned businesses to express their indignation at the atrocities. Uncowed by the horrific events, Wells continued her muckraking and investigative journalism until her newspaper office was destroyed in retaliation. Wells could not return to Memphis, so she moved to Chicago, where she could pursue her

Wells-Barnett supported the women's suffrage movement. She participated in the 1913 National American Women's Suffrage Association march on Washington, D.C., but defied the organizer's decision to segregate black from white marchers to accommodate the demands of southern participants. She joined the white Illinois delegation from the sidelines. This is the cover of the program for the 1913 procession. Wells-Barnett founded the first black women's suffrage organization, the Alpha Suffrage Club, the same year. Opposite page: As a young woman Ida B. Wells began writing to expose the practice of lynching, or mob murders, in the U.S. South. She wrote and published this pamphlet about it in 1892.

journalistic endeavors. She continued her blistering editorials on racially based injustices in local, national and international publications, investigating and exposing the fraudulent “reasons” white supremacists used to rationalize the lynching of black men, which had by then become a common occurrence.

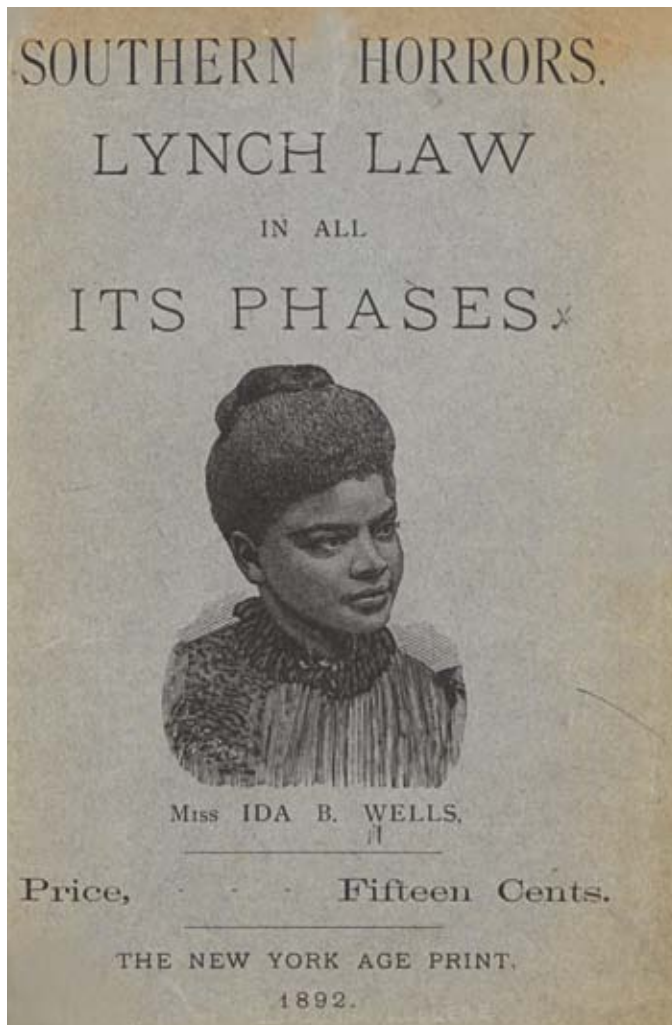
In Chicago, Wells also helped develop numerous African-American women’s and reform organizations. Throughout, she remained committed to her anti-lynching crusade, publishing the pamphlet *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases* (1892), with her image emblazoned on the cover. In 1895 Wells married attorney Ferdinand L. Barnett, the editor of one of Chicago’s early black-owned newspapers, and bore four children, which slowed but

did not stop her activism. She became a tireless worker for women’s suffrage, and participated in the historic 1913 Washington, D.C., march for universal suffrage. Unable to tolerate injustice of any kind, Wells-Barnett, along with Jane Addams (a pioneering social worker and later recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize), successfully blocked the establishment of segregated schools in Chicago.

In 1906, she joined with W.E.B. Du Bois and others to further the Niagara Movement, an African-American civil rights movement that opposed racial segregation, disenfranchisement, and the conciliatory strategy favored by other black activists such as Booker T. Washington. Wells-Barnett was one of two African-American women to sign “the call” to form the National

Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909, becoming one of the organization’s founding members. Due to her vocal opposition to Washington’s approach, however, she was branded a “radical” and blocked from assuming leadership positions within the group.

As late as 1930, Wells-Barnett became so disillusioned with the major political parties’ nominees to the state legislature that she decided to run for the Illinois State Legislature, becoming one of the first African-American women to run for public office in the United States. Wells-Barnett passed away a year later, after a lifetime crusading for justice. ❀



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Zora Neale Hurston

LITERARY LEGEND

by Valerie Boyd

Zora Neale Hurston knew how to make an entrance. At a literary awards dinner in 1925, the earthy Harlem newcomer turned heads and raised eyebrows as she accepted four awards: a second-place fiction prize for her short story “Spunk,” a second-place award in drama for her play *Color Struck*, and two honorable mentions. The names of the writers who beat out Hurston for first place that night would soon be forgotten. But the name of the second-place winner buzzed on tongues all night, and for days and years to come.

By all accounts, Hurston could walk into a roomful of strangers and, a few minutes and a couple of stories later, leave them so completely charmed that many offered to help her in any way they could. She had a fiery intellect, an infectious sense of humor, and “the gift,” as one friend put it, “of walking into hearts.” Her unique combination of talent, determination and charm led her to become one of the bright lights of the Harlem Renaissance and one of the most successful and most significant writers of the first half of the 20th century. Over a career that spanned more than 30 years, Hurston published



Novelist Zora Neale Hurston was an important figure in the Harlem Renaissance.

four novels, two books of folklore, an autobiography, numerous short stories and several essays, articles and plays.

Born on January 7, 1891, in Notasulga, Alabama, Hurston moved with her family to Eatonville, Florida,



when she was still a toddler. In Eatonville, Zora saw evidence of black achievement all around her. In the town hall, black men, including her father, John Hurston, formulated the laws that governed Eatonville. In the town's two churches, black women, including her mother, Lucy, directed the Sunday School curricula. On the porch of the village store black men and women passed worlds through their mouths in the form of colorful, engaging stories.

Growing up in a large house on five acres of land in this culturally affirming community, Zora had a relatively happy childhood, despite frequent clashes with her preacher-father, who sometimes sought — as she put it — to “squinch” her rambunctious spirit. In

contrast, her mother urged young Zora and her seven siblings to “jump at de sun,” employing the African-American vernacular common in Eatonville. “We might not land on the sun,” Hurston explained, “but at least we would get off the ground.”

Hurston's idyllic early years abruptly ended, however, when her mother died in 1904. Following Lucy Hurston's death, Zora's father quickly remarried and seemed to have little time or money for his children. Eventually, after Zora got into a fistfight with her young stepmother, her father sent Zora away to live with various relatives and to find her own way to adulthood. “Bare and bony of comfort and love,” was how Zora described those lean

Hurston examines a book at the New York Times Book Fair in New York City, 1937. Her own novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), earned her lasting fame.

years. She worked a series of menial jobs through her teens while struggling to complete her education. For almost a decade, Zora disappeared from the public record. When she re-emerged, in 1917, she was 26 years old and living in Baltimore — but still lacked a high school diploma. Disguising herself as a teenager to qualify for free public schooling, Zora listed her birth year as 1901 — making her a full decade younger than she really was. From then on, she always presented herself as at



A trained anthropologist, Hurston collected folk traditions, songs and stories for the Federal Writer's Project, part of the Works Progress Administration, during the Great Depression. She listens to musicians Rochelle French and Gabriel Brown on a porch in her hometown, Eatonville, Florida, in this 1935 photograph by legendary folklorist Alan Lomax.



Hurston in the late 1940s, at a football game at what was the North Carolina College for Negroes, now North Carolina Central University. Left: By 1934, when this photo was taken by Carl Van Vechten, Hurston was among the leading lights of the Harlem Renaissance arts scene for her award-winning play and short stories.

least 10 years younger than her true age. Fortunately, Hurston had the looks to pull it off. Photographs reveal that she was a handsome, big-boned woman with playful yet penetrating eyes, high cheekbones, and a full, graceful mouth always animated with expression.

After finally completing high school, Hurston went on to earn a bachelor's degree from prestigious Barnard College and, from there, pursued a Ph.D. at Columbia University under world-renowned anthropologist Franz Boas. Later, Hurston garnered a coveted Guggenheim fellowship to study indigenous communities in Jamaica and Haiti.

By 1935, Hurston was firmly ensconced in the American literary scene. She had published several short stories and articles, a well-received collection of black southern folklore, *Mules and Men*, and a novel, *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, that the *New York Times* called, "without fear of exaggeration the most vital and original novel about the American Negro that has yet been written." The late 1930s and early '40s marked the zenith of Hurston's career. Her masterwork, a novel called *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, is now required reading in high schools and colleges throughout the United States.

"There is no book more important to me than this one," novelist Alice Walker said of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. TV personality Oprah Winfrey has called the novel her "favorite love story of all time." Winfrey was so inspired by the story, in fact, that in 2005 she produced a television adaptation of it, starring Academy Award-winning actress Halle Berry. The film was viewed by a television audience of an estimated 24.6 million Americans, further entrenching Hurston's novel in the public consciousness and the American literary canon.

Today, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is widely regarded as a masterpiece.

But when it was first published in 1937, author Richard Wright, a contemporary of Hurston's, was unimpressed with her book: "The sensory sweep of her novel carries no theme, no message, no thought," he wrote. Still, the book earned largely positive reviews. Hurston was featured in several contemporary newspaper articles, and Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Edna St. Vincent Millay sent Hurston a telegram congratulating her on her success. "God does love black people, doesn't He?" Hurston joked with a friend, reveling in the praise the novel had garnered, despite persistent racism in much of the United States at that time. "Or am I just out on parole?"

Still, Hurston never received the financial rewards she deserved for her writing. (The largest publisher's advance she ever received for any of her books was \$500, while her white peers routinely received \$5,000 advances.) Consequently, when she died of a stroke in 1960 at the age of 69, her neighbors in Fort Pierce, Florida, had to collect donations to fund her funeral. The collection did not yield enough to pay for a headstone, so Hurston was buried in a grave that remained unmarked for more than a decade.

Ironically, back in 1945, Hurston had foreseen the possibility of dying without money. At the time, she had proposed a solution that would have benefited her and countless others. In a letter to W.E.B. Du Bois, whom Hurston considered the "dean" of African-American artists, she proposed "a cemetery for the illustrious Negro dead" on 100 acres of land in Florida. "Let no Negro celebrity, no matter what financial condition they might be in at death, lie in inconspicuous forgetfulness," Hurston urged Du Bois. "We must assume the responsibility of their graves being known and honored." But Du Bois, citing practical complications, wrote a curt reply discouraging her proposal.

As if impelled by Hurston's prescience, in the summer of 1973, Alice Walker, then a young writer, journeyed to Fort Pierce to place a marker at Hurston's grave in commemoration of the author who had so inspired Walker's own budding talent. The Garden of Heavenly Rest, where Hurston had been buried, was a neglected, segregated cemetery at the dead end of North 17th Street. Walker braved the snake-infested grounds to search for the final resting place of her literary heroine. Wading through waist-high undergrowth, Walker stumbled upon a sunken rectangular patch of ground that she identified as Hurston's grave. Unable to afford the majestic black headstone called "Ebony Mist" that Walker felt best honored Hurston's illustrious legacy, Walker purchased a plain, gray headstone instead. Borrowing from a Jean Toomer poem, Walker bestowed a fitting epitaph on the humble headstone: "Zora Neale Hurston: A Genius of the South." ❀

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Dorothy Irene Height

CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVIST

by **Holly Cowan Shulman**

I first met Dorothy Height in 1963. She was working on the March on Washington and had been introduced to my mother, Polly Cowan. My memories of Dorothy are keen. She was beautiful — as interested in fashion as my own mother. She was also brilliant. Her ability to conceptualize, in the nearly 50 years I knew her, never failed both to amaze and inspire me. She could take a simple thought I offered up, turn it around and around like a precious diamond, examine its facets, and describe its meaning with virtuosity.

Dorothy Height's long life encompassed the Jim Crow era and the presidency of Barack Obama. Born March 24, 1912, in Richmond, Virginia, at a time when American women were not allowed to vote, Dorothy Irene Height lived to see an African-American woman serve as U.S. secretary of state. She played an active role in nearly every major 20th-century reform movement for blacks and women and headed the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW) for more than two decades.

Dorothy Height grew up in an environment where the roots of opportunity grew amidst the seemingly immovable rocks of racial prejudice



Dorothy Irene Height was a lifelong social activist and educator.

and segregation. Her parents, Fannie Burroughs Height and James Edward Height, were born shortly after the Civil

War. They were professionals — her father a building contractor and her mother a nurse. They succeeded in a



South where Jim Crow laws imposed strict professional and behavioral limits on African Americans. As the demand for coal and steel increased during the First World War, northern industrialists began to recruit African-American workers from the South. By 1916 the push of segregation and the pull of northern industry drew the Heights to Rankin, Pennsylvania, a small mining and steel-producing town near Pittsburgh whose earliest workers came from eastern and southern Europe. Rankin was a place, Height wrote, for which “I have many happy memories of being together with people who were so different from one another.” (*Open Wide the Freedom Gates: A Memoir*, New York, 2003)

On August 28, 1963, Dorothy Height was on the dais beside Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as he delivered his memorable “I Have a Dream” speech to more than 200,000 people assembled for the March on Washington. She was the sole woman member in the united civil rights movement team with King, Whitney H. Young, John Lewis, A. Philip Randolph, James Farmer and Roy Wilkins.

Fannie and James Height were educated and ambitious. They were also committed Christians who devoted their spare time to their church. As Dorothy later remembered, “My father was very active in Baptist circles ... [and] our house was kind of a meeting ground” for southern blacks seeking work in northern industry, although industrial

employment was always more tenuous and less well paid for blacks than for whites. Dorothy’s parents expected their daughter to perform well at school, and to participate in civic culture. At the age of 14, having skipped several grades, she was elected president of the Pennsylvania State Federation of Girls Clubs and was a poster girl for the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA). An enthusiastic debater, she won a college scholarship in an oratory contest sponsored by the Elks, a national society whose Elks National Foundation supports charitable work. An all-white jury gave Height, the only black contestant, the first prize — a scholarship — for her speech arguing that constitutional protections include former slaves and their descendants. Her civil rights work had already begun.

Still a young teenager, Height lived with one of her sisters in Harlem when she went to New York City to attend Barnard College. Although accepted by Barnard, at the last minute she was denied admission on the grounds that Barnard’s annual quota for Negro students had been filled. Instead, she went to New York University and became a social worker.

Dorothy Height entered the national stage in the 1930s, a decade of economic depression and political reform. It was in 1930s Harlem that Height witnessed firsthand the degrading effects of racial prejudice, as she observed the mistreatment of black female household workers and the poverty on the streets of her neighborhood. She stayed in New York and came under the influence of two of the most important women of 20th-century America: first lady Eleanor Roosevelt and NCNW founder Mary McLeod Bethune.

In 1937, Height left her social worker job to become assistant director of the YWCA’s Emma Ransom House in Harlem. There she first met both



Dorothy Height, honored at the 2008 Cincinnati Museum "Freedom's Sisters" exhibition, poses in front of her portrait. Left: U.S. President Bill Clinton confers the Presidential Medal of Freedom upon Dorothy Height, at the White House, in August 1994. Height advised a succession of presidents on social justice and women's issues. She was also active internationally. She was a visiting professor at the Delhi School of Social Work at Delhi University in Delhi, India, in the 1950s; interacted with African women's organizations; worked with the United Nations International Women's Year conference; and lectured in South Africa for a USAID-sponsored program.

Roosevelt and Bethune, who asked her to join the NCNW to fight for women's rights, equal employment and education. It was a pivotal moment. Though she remained an employee of the YWCA until 1977, Height devoted herself to the NCNW and then to her sorority, Delta Sigma Theta. She was national president of Delta from 1947 to 1956, and the national president of the NCNW from 1977 to 1998. After retiring she became NCNW's chair and president emerita.

In the 1960s, Dorothy Height emerged as one of the United States' major civil rights leaders. She was the only woman who was part of the United Council of Civil Rights Leaders, representing NCNW, the only woman's organization in the civil rights movement, and working alongside such better-known figures as Martin Luther King Jr. and Roy Wilkins. Believing that women could be grass-roots missionaries for freedom, in 1964 Height and my mother launched a project called Wednesdays in Mississippi (WIMS) to support Freedom Summer (a campaign to register black voters in June 1964) and the civil rights movement. Organized and staffed entirely by women, WIMS flew interracial and interfaith groups of women from the North into Jackson, Mississippi, every Tuesday, sending them across the state on Wednesdays to help civil rights workers and promote African Americans' voting rights. My mother was white and Jewish and the memory of anti-Semitism in the Chicago of her childhood, and of the Holocaust, made her especially sensitive to oppression. As she explained in the 1970s, for her, "freedom for black people was a step toward freedom for all people. ... No one of us can be free until all of us are free." A shared commitment to promoting civil rights and human dignity sealed my mother's friendship with Dorothy Height.

Personal Recollections

One of my fondest memories of Dorothy Height occurred in 1966 when I was living in a tiny tenement on the sixth floor of a Greenwich Village walk-up. One evening she, my mother and my father, Lou, came to visit me. It still amazes me that the three of them, all in their mid-50s, walked up all those stairs just to come to my home, giving me the pleasure of extending to them my hospitality. They sat there talking: three of the most remarkable people in my life, Dorothy a beloved member of the Cowan family.

In the 1990s she asked me to do some research about African Americans who had boarded a ship called the *Pearl*. She had become interested in the story of Emily and Mary Edmondson, two young slave girls who attempted to escape and were then sold at a slave market located on Seventh Street and Pennsylvania Avenue in northwest Washington, D.C. — a location across the street from the current offices of the NCNW. I remember that Height was quite clear about why the past related to the present, why finding out about the Edmondson girls was critical and how these stories could inspire women of color today. As Height wrote in her memoir, "I believe it was providential that we had the opportunity to claim this site and to sustain upon it an active presence for freedom and justice."

Dorothy Height's commitment and work on behalf of the causes she believed in did not waver as she grew older. In 1986, at the age of 74, she launched a crusade for the black family and committed the NCNW to international development for the betterment of women and families in Africa and developing nations. She remained active until her death on April 20, 2010. In a life that afforded little spare

time, she wrote two books: The first was a memoir, *Open Wide the Freedom Gates*, published in 2003. The second, *Living with Purpose*, to be published posthumously, explores how a person can discern one's true purpose in life — and act upon it. In this book she shares firsthand lessons from people ranging from Roosevelt and Bethune to children in India and mothers in Mississippi.

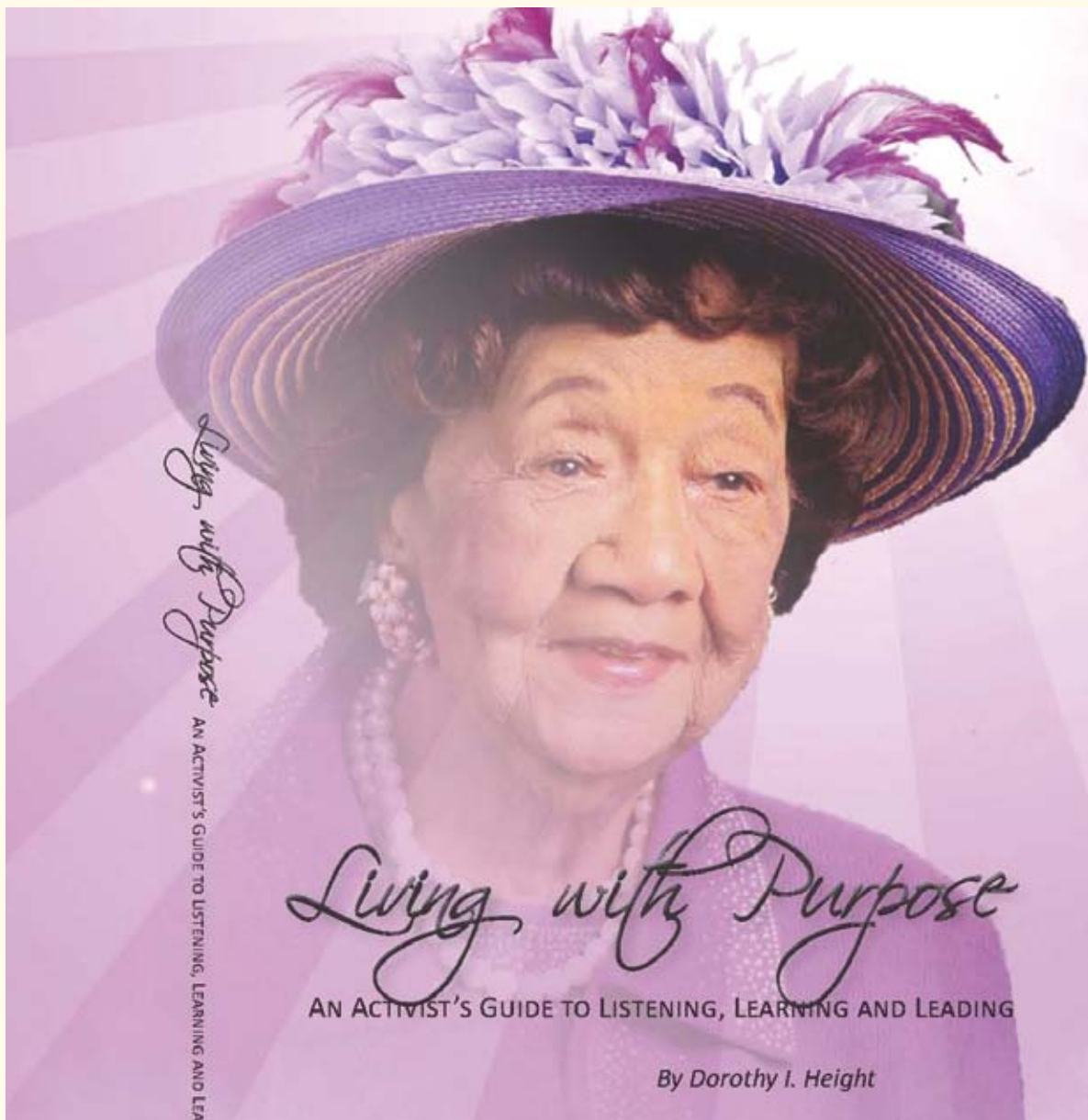
Dorothy Height's remarkable memory and conceptual genius, combined with an unsurpassed commitment to social justice and an inspiring charisma, made her great. I was privileged to know her personally, but as a historian I know Dorothy Height as an iconic figure through whom Americans can examine and remember our shared past. ❀

Holly Cowan Shulman was a friend of Dorothy Height and is currently a historian at the University of Virginia. Editor, with David C. Mattern, of The Selected Letters of Dolley Payne Madison (2003), Shulman also edits the Dolley Madison Digital Edition and is founding director of Documents Compass at the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities.

LIVING WITH PURPOSE

From *Living with Purpose* (2010) by Dorothy I. Height

Dorothy Irene Height (1912–2010), a key figure in the civil rights movement, worked quietly but effectively beside leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to achieve equal rights for minorities and women. Her impact nonetheless matched that of her male associates, as she organized a powerful force of black and white women across the country. She guided the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW) and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) for decades. Her life was devoted to service.



Cover of *Living with Purpose*, by Dorothy Height

Many people are derailed [from pursuing a life of service] from the start by overarching self-interest. Of course, we have to feed, clothe and have a roof over our family. But it becomes painfully obvious when someone latches onto a cause and only cares about their own accomplishment, recognition and advancement. Instead, it is better to think about “enlightened self-interest.” Enlightened self-interest describes how putting your objective far ahead of your personal agenda creates a vortex where your beneficial personal goals often fulfill themselves without padding your expense account, pushing yourself into photo ops with celebrities or walking into every situation with an attitude of entitlement. More often than not, your heartfelt dedication to your objective and your clear lack of self-interest create a level of success that can even surpass your initial expectations. I remember a reporter from the Associated Press asking me somewhat incredulously how I had the courage to call up corporations, foundations and individual donors and ask them for thousands and thousands of dollars. Did not it make me feel nervous, she was curious to know? “No,” I answered. “I have never asked for anything for myself.”



Dorothy Height (left) was a caseworker for the New York City Welfare Department before she became an assistant director of the Harlem YWCA's Emma Ransom House in 1937. It was a pivotal move, because there she met Mary McLeod Bethune (right) and Eleanor Roosevelt. Height had already begun her civil rights activism when Bethune asked her to join the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW), which Bethune founded in 1912. Bethune was the daughter of former slaves and devoted her life to civil rights and the education of black students.



From left, educator and civil rights leader Mary McLeod Bethune, Sherman Hilbert, Channing Tobias, and Dorothy Height are assembled for a 1949 WMCA Radio broadcast. Tobias was an educator and a longtime officer of the YMCA who advocated improving race relations. He advised two U.S. presidents.



Eleanor Roosevelt receives the Mary McLeod Bethune Human Rights Award from NCNW President Dorothy Height in November 1960. Roosevelt, first lady of the United States from 1933 to 1945, was a close friend of Bethune. Through Bethune and other civil rights leaders, Roosevelt became a civil rights advocate. Both women were significant figures in Height's life.

“But what is in it for me?” That is always a proper question. The important part of that question is to determine “what does ‘me’ want?” For me, my answer has always been that the love of service is sufficient reward. It is not that I will be paid back that I am willing to invest myself in helping someone move ahead.

Some people look at me and falsely assume that my life has been cloistered in self-sacrifice. It is hard for some to understand that when you do things that are helpful to others that you are also helping yourself. It is based on a recognition that I am not diminished but I am gradually accelerated when I work with you. Here’s the important distinction: It is not “I am doing this for you.” Instead, “Whatever I am doing, I am doing it with you.”

In recent years, the idea of making a career out of public service has been a harder sell, for example, working for community organizations and non-profits. There is such an emphasis in our society on status and wealth. It is rare when someone with a great education and professional expertise would chuck away such promise to work for lower pay and accolade. Too often, we hesitate to do for fear that we will not get the credit.

In the Bible, it is referred to as Agape. It is this notion of an unconditional love of service to others that you will also find included in most religions and spiritual beliefs. It is not based on giving motivated by what I will get back, like some form of karmic quid-pro-quo. And get it out of your mind that the person you help now might later on return the favor and assist you if you ever needed it. If you do so, you will often be very sorely disappointed.

Courtesy of the Dorothy I. Height Foundation



Founded at Howard University in 1913 by a group of young women dedicated to social justice, the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority has had many illustrious members, including Dorothy Height, who served as the sorority’s national president from 1947 to 1956. Accompanied by several Delta Sigma Theta members, Height presents then first lady Mamie Eisenhower with a copy of the sorority’s song in May 1953.



In January 1960, Dorothy Height posed for a photo in front of the piano at the NCNW Council House in Washington before attending the Inaugural Ball for President John F. Kennedy. Height served as an adviser to a succession of presidents, Democrat and Republican.



Dorothy Height (seated second from right) poses with the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW) staff at their Council House in Washington in the 1960s. Height began volunteering at the NCNW in the late 1930s and served on its staff for more than 40 years. She was elected NCNW president in 1957, holding that position until 1998, when she became the council's chair and president emerita.



Dorothy Height (far right) at a 1962 meeting in the White House with President John F. Kennedy (center). Also in the photo are then Labor Secretary Arthur J. Goldberg (right) and Eleanor Roosevelt (left).



Civil rights leaders, (from left) Morris Dosewell, American Labor Council; Dorothy Height, National Council of Negro Women (NCNW); Alexander Allen, Urban League; Basil Paterson, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP); and Bayard Rustin, director of the A. Philip Randolph Institute, converse after a meeting with then New York Mayor Robert F. Wagner in 1965. Height crusaded for civil rights, education and fair housing all her life.



A team of Wednesdays in Mississippi volunteers attends a debriefing session at the NCNW Council House in Washington, D.C. in 1965. From left: Dorothy Height, Billie Hetzel, Flaxie Pinkett, Peggy Roach, Justine Randers-Pehrson and Marie Barksdale. The interracial and interfaith teams of women would leave for Mississippi on Tuesday, spend Wednesday talking to women about social justice, and return on Thursday. Later the outreach effort became Workshops in Mississippi.



A trio of strong civil rights leaders, (from left) Fannie Lou Hamer, Dorothy Height and Polly Cowan, confers at the National Council of Negro Women's 32nd annual meeting in 1967. After the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, Height and Cowan, an NCNW board member, organized teams of black and white women for "Wednesdays in Mississippi." Each Wednesday teams traveled to the southern state to teach both black and white women about social justice issues and their rights as citizens.



Dorothy Height's funeral in April 2010 was held at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. Among attendees were President Obama, his wife Michelle, and Vice President Joe Biden (first row, right).

Remarks by the President at the Funeral Service for Dr. Dorothy Height

Washington National Cathedral, Washington, D.C.

THE PRESIDENT: Please be seated. Let me begin by saying a word to Dr. Dorothy Height's sister, Ms. Aldridge. To some, she was a mentor. To all, she was a friend. But to you, she was family, and my family offers yours our sympathy for your loss.

We are gathered here today to celebrate the life, and mourn the passing, of Dr. Dorothy Height. It is fitting that we do so here, in our National Cathedral of Saint Peter and Saint Paul. Here, in a place of great honor. Here, in the House of God. Surrounded by the love of family and of friends. The love in this sanctuary is a testament to a life lived righteously; a life that lifted other lives; a life that changed this country for the better over the course of nearly one century here on Earth.

Michelle and I didn't know Dr. Height as well, or as long, as many of you. We were reminded during a previous moment in the service, when you have a nephew who's 88, you've lived a full life.

But we did come to know her in the early days of my campaign. And we came to love her, as so many loved her. We came to love her stories. And we loved her smile. And we loved those hats that she wore like a crown — regal. In the White House, she was a regular. She came by not once, not twice — 21 times she stopped by the White House; took part in our discussions around health care reform in her final months.

Last February, I was scheduled to see her and other civil rights leaders to discuss the pressing problems of unemployment — Reverend Sharpton, Ben Jealous of the NAACP, Marc Morial of the National Urban League. Then we discovered that Washington was about to be blanketed by the worst blizzard in record — two feet of snow.

So I suggested to one of my aides, we should call Dr. Height and say we're happy to reschedule the meeting. Certainly if the others come, she should not feel obliged. True to form, Dr. Height insisted on coming, despite the blizzard, never mind that she was in a wheelchair. She was not about to let just a bunch of men in this meeting. It was only when the



President Barack Obama delivered the eulogy at Dorothy Height's funeral service at the Washington National Cathedral on April 29, 2010.

car literally could not get to her driveway that she reluctantly decided to stay home. But she still sent a message about what needed to be done.

And I tell that story partly because it brings a smile to my face, but also because it captures the quiet, dogged, dignified persistence that all of us who loved Dr. Height came to know so well — an attribute that we understand she learned early on.

Born in the capital of the old Confederacy, brought north by her parents as part of that great migration, Dr. Height was raised in another age, in a different America, beyond the experience of many. It's hard to imagine, I think, life in the first decades of that last century when the elderly woman that we knew was only a girl. Jim Crow ruled the South. The Klan was on the rise — a powerful political force. Lynching was all too often the penalty for the offense of black skin. Slaves had been freed within living memory, but too often, their children, their grandchildren remained captive, because they were denied justice and denied equality, denied opportunity, denied a chance to pursue their dreams.

The progress that followed — progress that so many of you helped to achieve, progress that ultimately made it possible for Michelle and me to be here as President and First Lady — that progress came slowly.

Progress came from the collective effort of multiple generations of Americans. From preachers and lawyers, and thinkers and doers, men and women like Dr. Height, who took it upon themselves — often at great risk — to change this country for the better. From men like W.E.B Du Bois and A. Philip Randolph; women like Mary McLeod Bethune and Betty Friedan — they're Americans whose names we know. They are leaders whose legacies we teach. They are giants who fill our history books. Well, Dr. Dorothy Height deserves a place in this pantheon. She, too, deserves a place in our history books. She, too, deserves a place of honor in America's memory.

Look at her body of work. Desegregating the YWCA. Laying the groundwork for integration on Wednesdays in Mississippi. Lending pigs to poor farmers as a sustainable source of income. Strategizing with civil rights leaders, holding her own, the only woman in the room, Queen Esther to this Moses Generation — even as she led the National Council of Negro Women with vision and energy, vision and class.

But we remember her not solely for all she did during the civil rights movement. We remember her for all she did over a lifetime, behind the scenes, to broaden the movement's reach. To shine a light on stable families and tight-knit communities. To make us see the drive for civil rights and women's rights not as a separate struggle, but as part of a larger movement to secure the rights of all humanity, regardless of gender, regardless of race, regardless of ethnicity.

It's an unambiguous record of righteous work, worthy of remembrance, worthy of recognition. And yet, one of the ironies is that year after year, decade in, decade out, Dr. Height went about her work quietly, without fanfare, without self-promotion. She never cared about who got the credit. She didn't need to see her picture in the papers. She understood that the movement gathered strength from the bottom up, those unheralded men and women who don't always make it into the history books but who steadily insisted on their dignity, on their manhood and womanhood. She wasn't interested in credit. What she cared about was the cause. The cause of justice. The cause of equality. The cause of opportunity. Freedom's cause.

And that willingness to subsume herself, that humility and that grace, is why we honor Dr. Dorothy Height. As it is written in the Gospel of Matthew: "For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted." I don't think the author of the Gospel would mind me rephrasing: "whoever humbles herself will be exalted."

One of my favorite moments with Dr. Height — this was just a few months ago — we had decided to put up the Emancipation Proclamation in the Oval Office, and we invited some elders to share reflections of the civil rights movement. And she came and it was an inter-generational event, so we had young children there, as well as elders, and the elders were asked to share stories. And she talked about attending a dinner in the 1940s at the home of Dr. Benjamin Mays, then president of Morehouse College. And seated at the table that evening was a 15-year-old student, "a gifted child," as she described him, filled with a sense of purpose, who was trying to decide whether to enter medicine, or law, or the ministry.

And many years later, after that gifted child had become a gifted preacher — I'm sure he had been told to be on his best behavior — after he led a bus boycott in Montgomery, and inspired a nation with his dreams, he delivered a sermon on what he called "the drum major instinct" — a sermon that said we all have the desire to be first, we all want to be at the front of the line.

The great test of a life, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, is to harness that instinct; to redirect it towards advancing the greater good; toward changing a community and a country for the better; toward doing the Lord's work.

I sometimes think Dr. King must have had Dorothy Height in mind when he gave that speech. For Dorothy Height met the test. Dorothy Height embodied that instinct. Dorothy Height was a drum major for justice. A drum major for equality. A drum major for freedom. A drum major for service. And the lesson she would want us to leave with today — a lesson she lived out each and every day — is that we can all be first in service. We can all be drum majors for a righteous cause. So let us live out that lesson. Let us honor her life by changing this country for the better as long as we are blessed to live. May God bless Dr. Dorothy Height and the union that she made more perfect.

Claudette Colvin

THE FIRST TO KEEP HER SEAT

by **Phillip Hoose**

The Civil War in the United States ended slavery without ending racial prejudice. In the decades that followed, Caucasian Americans passed hundreds of laws (primarily in the southern part of the United States) designed to keep whites and blacks from living, working and riding public transportation together. They were not even allowed to be buried in the same cemeteries. Nicknamed “Jim Crow” after a character in a minstrel song (performed by white entertainers in “blackface” makeup), these laws and rules were often enforced by violence. One of the first successful challenges to Jim Crow came in Montgomery, Alabama, in March 1955 when a high school junior named Claudette Colvin was arrested for refusing to surrender her seat on a public bus to a white passenger and, for the first time in the city’s history, fought the charges in court. Although black leaders did not select Claudette as their “poster child” for the subsequent Montgomery Bus Boycott — instead opting nine months later for 42-year-old Rosa Parks — the Colvin case provided tactical and political information that was later useful to boycott leaders, including



Claudette Colvin was 15 years old when she refused to surrender her seat.



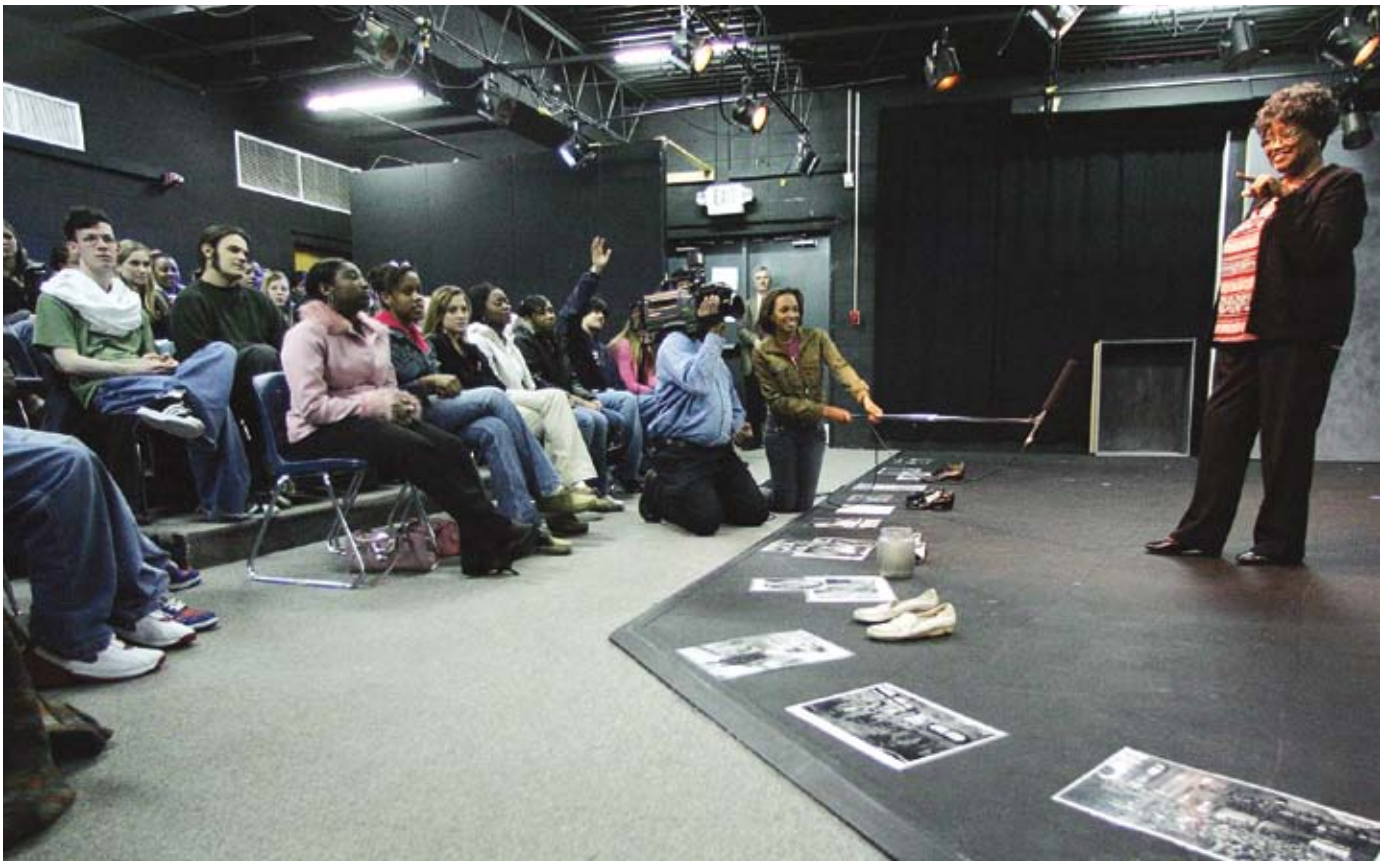
the young Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. Significantly, Colvin helped bring the boycott — and racial segregation in intrastate public transportation — to an end by courageously serving as a plaintiff in the landmark lawsuit *Browder v. Gayle*.

Fifteen-year-old Claudette Colvin boarded the Highland Gardens bus in downtown Montgomery, Alabama, the afternoon of March 2, 1955, and settled in for the long ride home to her neighborhood across town. She knew the seating rules well — everybody did. The 10 seats in front were for white passengers only. The 26 seats behind them were controlled by the driver, who constantly glanced in the mirror

above his head to make sure no one violated the seating regulations. After the 10 seats up front reserved for whites were filled, the driver ordered black customers to yield their seats in the middle and rear of the bus to incoming white passengers.

When Claudette boarded the bus that day, there were no white people yet present. The passengers were mostly students like her, heading home from school. Claudette slid into a seat in the mid-section, next to the window. Three of her classmates took seats in the same row. Claudette daydreamed as the bus began to fill up. Soon, a Caucasian woman moved into the aisle next to her row and waited pointedly. Claudette

Black and white passengers segregated on a trolley in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1956, even after the Supreme Court decision outlawing segregation on all public buses. Southern states held that “states’ rights” superseded federal rulings. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawed such racial segregation. Opposite page: Colvin (right) speaks to students at Booker T. Washington Magnet School in Montgomery, Alabama, about how she resisted segregation as a teenager in the 1950s. She was a student at the same school in 1955 when she refused to give up her bus seat to a white woman.



snapped out of her daydream, suddenly realizing that she was expected to get up and move for this woman.

The driver cocked his glance in the rearview mirror and ordered the African-American girls to take seats farther back. Claudette's classmates rose and walked slowly to the rear of the bus. But Claudette did not speak nor did she move. "Hey, get up!" the driver yelled. Claudette remained seated. The driver snapped open the door and hailed a passing transit policeman to hop aboard and help him enforce the seating regulations. But the transit officer had no authority to make an arrest. A block later, the driver summoned two city policemen waiting in a nearby squad car. They boarded the bus and ordered Claudette to rise. When Claudette refused, the officers grabbed her wrists and jerked her from her seat, sending her textbooks flying. Shouting that she had a constitutional right to sit where she chose, Claudette willed herself not

to struggle. "I couldn't get up that day," recalled Claudette, years later. "History kept me stuck to my seat. I felt the hand of Harriet Tubman pushing down on one shoulder and Sojourner Truth pushing down on the other."

The officers handcuffed Claudette, shoved her into a police car, and drove her to City Hall — insulting her along the way. The 15-year-old was booked and escorted to a cell in the adult jail. The iron cell door clanged shut and locked behind her. Claudette found herself alone in a small room containing a rusted toilet and a cot without a mattress. Did her mother have any idea where she was? Claudette fell to her knees, sobbing and praying.

Hours later, Claudette's mother and pastor bailed her out of jail and took her home. But Claudette was in serious legal trouble. The city had charged her with disorderly conduct, violating the segregation law, and with "assaulting" the policemen who had dragged her

off the bus. In the past, other African-American passengers had been arrested for refusing to yield their seat to a white passenger but no one had ever fought the charges. They typically paid a fine and went home. Claudette was different. Funds to hire an attorney for Claudette were raised with help from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and black churches throughout Montgomery.

At Claudette's hearing, the presiding judge threw out the first two charges but kept the assault charge. Claudette was placed on probation in the custody of her parents. Her attorney appealed, but the effort was futile. No judge in the city was going to overturn the verdict against her.

After the trial, Claudette returned to Booker T. Washington High School and tried to get on with her junior year. Rather than treating her as a hero, many of her classmates mocked her. She became discouraged and depressed.

"Sometimes I felt I did something wrong ... I lost a lot of friends," Claudette later admitted.

In December 1955, nine months after Claudette's arrest, a 42-year-old seamstress named Rosa Parks was arrested for taking a similar stand on a crowded bus in the same city. Now prepared, thanks in part to Claudette's earlier experience, Montgomery's black leaders rallied around Mrs. Parks and quickly organized a boycott of all the city buses. About 35,000 fliers were passed out, urging the black community to walk or carpool until city officials changed the way black passengers were treated on public buses.

Black leaders, including Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., backed away from Claudette Colvin, choosing instead to use Mrs. Parks alone as the face of the bus protest. Why? Some community leaders assumed that a teenage girl who was rebellious enough to resist authorities trying to drag her from a public bus would be difficult to control in a tightly organized protest. However, Claudette thought she was overlooked because, in contrast to Mrs. Parks, her skin was dark, her hair coarse, and her family was poorer than the black leaders in town. "We weren't in the inner circle," Claudette later said. "The middle-class blacks didn't want us as a role model."

After the bus boycott dragged on for months and city officials obstinately refused to negotiate, black leaders decided to sue the city of Montgomery in federal court, alleging that segregation laws violated the U.S. Constitution. But finding plaintiffs was difficult. To put one's name on a lawsuit publicly challenging the Jim Crow system was to risk one's life. In the end, only four females agreed to serve as plaintiffs; one of them was 16-year-old Claudette Colvin.

When Claudette was called to testify in this trial held on May 11,

1956, she advanced to the witness stand and sat down, raising her right hand and smoothing her blue dress. She glanced at the three white judges to her right, who sat in grim appraisal of the headstrong young Claudette. The city's lawyer attacked right away, attempting to trap Claudette into testifying that Dr. King had manipulated Montgomery's blacks into boycotting the busses against their will.

"Who are your leaders?" the lawyer demanded.

"... Just we, ourselves," Claudette replied evenly.

"Why did you stop riding on December fifth?" asked the lawyer, referring to the start date of the boycott.

Claudette's eyes narrowed as she replied, "Because we were treated wrong, dirty and nasty."

One of the other plaintiffs' lawyers later recalled, "If there was a star witness ... it had to be Claudette Colvin."

Months later — after the bus boycott had continued for more than a year — the judges ruled 2-1 that Montgomery's bus segregation laws were unconstitutional. The U.S. Supreme Court upheld the decision, forcing the city to desegregate its buses.

Two years after the trial, at the age of 18, Claudette Colvin moved to New York City, where she worked for the next 50 years, primarily as a nurse's aide in a Manhattan nursing home. She told no one in New York about her role in catalyzing the historic Montgomery Bus Boycott as a teen, save for a handful of reporters and researchers interested in civil rights who discovered her story and sought her out. Claudette, now 70, is retired and is the grandmother of five. She is proud that as a 15-year-old, she set the stage for the first major victory of the U.S. civil rights movement. She now speaks to youth about how she resisted bus segregation as a teenager in the 1950s.

"When it comes to justice," says Claudette, "there is no easy way to get it. You can't sugarcoat it. You have to take a stand and say, 'This is not right.' And I did." ❀

Phillip Hoose won the 2009 National Book Award in the Young Readers category for his book Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice. He is the author of numerous books, articles, essays, and stories, including The Race to Save the Lord God Bird, Hey Little Ant (co-authored with his daughter Hannah), and We Were There, Too! Young People in U.S. History, also a National Book Award Finalist. A graduate of the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Sciences, Hoose has been a staff member of The Nature Conservancy since 1977. He is also a songwriter and performing musician who lives in Portland, Maine.

John H. Johnson

MEDIA MOGUL

by **Clint C. Wilson II**

In his autobiography, *Succeeding Against the Odds*, John H. Johnson, an African American who overcame poverty to become one of the wealthiest businessmen in the United States, revealed what pleased him most in attaining success: “the greater the handicap, the greater the triumph.” Johnson, born in 1918, rose from humble origins in the Mississippi River town of Arkansas City, Arkansas, to found the country’s largest African-American publishing empire and a variety of other business enterprises. He became a confidant of U.S. presidents of both political parties and served his country as a special envoy to several countries in Europe and Africa.

Johnson was the only child of Leroy Johnson and Gertrude Jenkins Johnson. His father was killed in a sawmill accident when he was eight years old. The following year, 1927, his mother married James Williams, who worked as a bakery shop deliveryman. The family valued education highly and impressed its importance upon young Johnny (the name with which he was christened) during his formative years. For blacks in Arkansas City, public education ended at the eighth grade because there was no



Entrepreneur John H. Johnson founded *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines.

public high school for them, and laws mandating racial segregation prevented blacks from attending the high school

for white students. However, Johnson and his mother knew about greater educational opportunities in Chicago,

Illinois. With money saved under a mattress, thanks to his mother's several domestic jobs, Johnson and his mother boarded a train and became part of the African-American migration to Chicago in 1933. Johnson's stepfather, James Williams, soon joined them and Johnson was enrolled in the city's all black DuSable High School.

At first, Johnson's mother and stepfather found it difficult to obtain employment in Chicago in the midst of the Great Depression, and for a while the family had to rely upon public welfare assistance. Eventually, both Johnson and his stepfather found work in federal New Deal jobs programs established under the administration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Despite the fact that Johnson had proven himself to be an able student at DuSable, he was ridiculed by fellow students who saw his ragged clothes and unrefined "country" manners as ill-suited for middle-class African-American society. Johnson used the slights from other students as motivation to become a leader at DuSable, where he served as student council president, editor of the school newspaper and sales manager of the yearbook.

John H. Johnson poses with his daughter, Linda Johnson Rice, and the magazines he founded. He groomed her to take responsibility for the business, and she assumed control of Johnson Publishing at his death in 2005.

Opposite page: Lyndon B. Johnson, the 36th U.S. president (1963-1969), holding a copy of *Jet* magazine, talks with John H. Johnson. President Johnson supported civil rights legislation that was enacted during his time in office.





Johnson's hard work and dedication to scholarship led to one of the crucial events in his life. As a high school senior he was honored at a luncheon sponsored by the Urban League, a community-based organization advocating economic empowerment of urban minorities. Among those in attendance was the keynote speaker, Harry H. Pace, president of the Supreme Liberty Life Insurance Company. After Pace's speech, Johnson approached Pace and told him how much he appreciated his remarks. The insurance executive, who often helped talented black youths, complimented young Johnson and encouraged him to attend college. He gave Johnson a part-time job at the insurance company to supplement Johnson's scholarship to the University of Chicago. Johnson was impressed by the success of Pace's black-owned

insurance firm and he eventually dropped his university studies to hone his skills as an entrepreneur. In 1941 he married Eunice Walker and assumed full-time work at Supreme Liberty Life. He later took courses at Northwestern University's School of Commerce.

Among Johnson's duties at Supreme Liberty Life was collection of news and information about black Americans and preparing a weekly digest for Pace. Johnson realized a business opportunity existed in the idea of a "Negro digest" that could be marketed and sold. In 1942 he used his mother's furniture as collateral for a \$500 loan to publish the first issue of *Negro Digest*, a magazine patterned after *Reader's Digest*. Although there were format similarities between the two publications, Johnson noted in his autobiography that *Reader's Digest* tended to be upbeat whereas

Negro Digest spoke to an audience that was "angry, disillusioned and disappointed" with social inequities in the United States.

Johnson used a clever marketing scheme to jump-start *Negro Digest*. He asked 20,000 of Supreme Liberty Life's policyholders for \$2 to subscribe to the proposed magazine — and about 3,000 of them responded. Then, to get the magazine on newsstands, he persuaded 20 friends to visit newsstands and ask for it. After his friends bought the magazines, Johnson resold them. The marketing strategy was repeated in other cities, and within eight months *Negro Digest* reached \$50,000 a month in sales.

In 1945 Johnson launched his second publication using a format made popular by the major picture magazine *Life*. Johnson's wife, Eunice, named the

publication *Ebony*. The entire 25,000-copy press run of *Ebony's* first issue sold out. Johnson's belief that African Americans craved a publication that would focus on black achievement and portray them in a positive manner was proven correct: 40 years after its founding, the glossy magazine had reached a circulation of 2.3 million.

Johnson created *Jet* in 1951 as a pocket-sized weekly magazine carrying news, society, entertainment and political information pertinent to African Americans. The growth of Johnson's publications paralleled the emergence of the civil rights movement in the United States and chronicled its developments. *Ebony's* pages were filled with success stories of African Americans in all walks of life, including education, jurisprudence, science and government. Johnson said *Ebony's* purpose was to inspire its readers. The magazine also addressed issues of racial discrimination and injustice in the United States. Johnson wanted a black readership. As the *New York Times* reported in a 1990 interview: Johnson was somewhat disappointed that 12 percent of *Ebony* and *Jet's* readers were white, saying he wanted "to be king of the black hill, not the mixed hill."

Johnson added other enterprises to his lucrative empire, including additional magazine ventures, book publishing, the Fashion Fair cosmetics line, several radio stations and majority ownership of Supreme Liberty Life Insurance Company, which he bought in 1980.

Johnson maintained a close relationship with his mother and never forgot that his business empire began with her willingness to put up her furniture as collateral to establish *Negro Digest*. She was vice president of the company and had a sixth-floor

suite in the Johnson Publishing Company building in Chicago where she "could watch her investment grow." He appointed his stepfather, James Williams, as superintendent of the building.

Despite the wide range and diversity of his business holdings, Johnson admitted his management style was hands-on and direct, with every detail of operations requiring his personal approval. While tasks may have been delegated, Johnson believed that his staff required daily monitoring and oversight to ensure optimum performance. Although he named his daughter, Linda Johnson Rice, president and chief operating officer in the late 1980s, he clearly remained in charge but asked "her opinion on decisions I plan to make."

By 1990 Johnson's personal wealth was estimated at \$150 million. He was honored by President Bill Clinton with the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1997, and in 2001 he was inducted into the Arkansas Business Hall of Fame. Other awards and honors bestowed on Johnson include the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Spingarn Medal, the Horatio Alger Award — and the distinction of being the first African American to make the *Forbes* magazine's list of the 400 wealthiest Americans.

Johnson's contributions paved the way for the success of today's African-American media moguls, including Oprah Winfrey, Black Entertainment Television's founder Robert Johnson (no relation) and film producer Tyler Perry. The School of Communications at Howard University was named for Johnson following his \$4 million gift to advance communications studies for black students.

Johnson's business philosophy is summarized in one of his most often cited quotations: "Failure is a word I don't accept."

John H. Johnson died of congestive heart failure in August 2005 at age 87. ♣

Clint C. Wilson II is professor of journalism and graduate professor of the John H. Johnson School of Communications at Howard University. He has taught at the University of Southern California, where he earned his doctorate, California State University, Los Angeles, and Pepperdine University. He is an expert on African-American news media, and his books on the subject include Racism, Sexism and the Media with Félix Gutiérrez and Lena M. Chao (2003, 3rd edition). He has written for magazines such as Journalism Educator and the Columbia Journalism Review, and for various news organizations, including the Associated Press and the Washington Post. He is a founder of the Black Journalists Association of Southern California.

Will Allen

URBAN FARMER

by **Elizabeth Royte**

Will Allen ascends a berm of wood chips and brewer's mash and gently probes the aromatic mass with a pitchfork. "Look at this," he says, pleased with the writhing mass of red worms that dangles from his tines. The farmer rakes another section with his fingers and palms a few beauties. "Creating soil from waste is what I enjoy most," he says. "Anyone can grow food."

Like others in the so-called "good food" movement, Allen, 61, asserts that our industrial food system is depleting soil, poisoning water, gobbling fossil fuels and stuffing us with bad calories. He advocates eating locally grown food. But to Allen, local is not a rural field or a suburban garden: it is 14 greenhouses crammed onto two acres [.8 hectare] in a working-class neighborhood on Milwaukee's northwest side, not far from the city's largest public-housing project.

And this is why Allen is so fond of his worms. When you're producing a quarter of a million dollars' worth of food in a small space, soil fertility is everything. Without microbe- and nutrient-rich worm castings, Allen's



Will Allen founded Growing Power, an urban farm cooperative.

Growing Power farm couldn't provide healthful food to 10,000 urbanites — through his on-farm retail store, in

schools and restaurants and at farmer's markets. He couldn't train farmers in intensive polyculture — growing an

array of crops in a small space — or convert millions of pounds of food waste into a version of black gold.

With seeds planted at quadruple density and nearly every inch of space maximized to generate exceptional bounty, Growing Power is an agricultural super-city of upward-thrusting tendrils and duct-taped infrastructure. Greens shoot from 25,000 pots hung in five tiers; the farm produces a thousand trays of sprouts weekly. Out back, chickens, ducks, turkeys and goats roam. Greenhouses shelter in-ground fish tanks teeming with tens of thousands of tilapia and perch. Pumps send dirty fish water up into beds of watercress, which filter pollutants and trickle the cleaner water back down to the fish — a symbiotic system called aquaponics.

If Growing Power is Eden, the surrounding neighborhood is a food desert. “From the housing project, it’s more than three miles to the supermarket,” Allen tells me. “That’s a long way to go for groceries if you don’t have a car or can’t carry stuff.” Fast-food joints, liquor stores and convenience stores selling highly processed, high-calorie foods, on the other hand, are abundant. Allen says, “We’ve got to change the system so everyone has safe, equitable access to healthy food.”

Propelled by alarming rates of diabetes, heart disease and obesity, and by food-safety scares and rising awareness of industrial agriculture’s environmental footprint, the good food movement is timely. Backyard and rooftop farms are sprouting across the United States; community gardens have waiting lists; seed houses and canning suppliers are oversold.

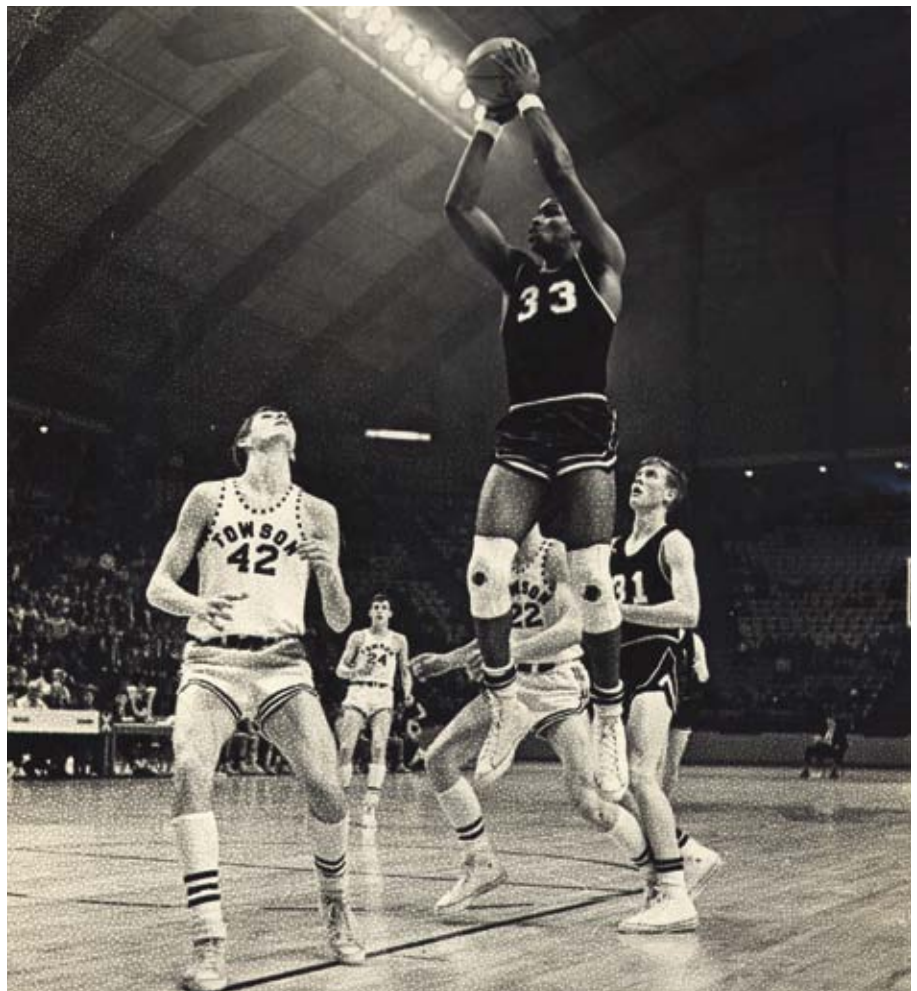
Allen, too, is on a roll, winning accolades, awards and sizable grants from foundations. Today, he’s the go-to expert on urban farming, regularly conducting two-day workshops to teach worm composting, aquaponics

construction and other farm skills. “We need 50 million more people growing food,” Allen tells his students, “on porches, in pots, in side yards.” The reasons are simple: rising oil prices will make food transport and oil-based fertilizers more expensive; as cities expand and housing developments replace farmland, the ability to grow more food in less space closer to population centers will become ever more important.

Allen and his five siblings grew up outside Bethesda, Maryland. “My father was a sharecropper in South Carolina,” he tells me as we drive toward a suburb where Growing Power leases a 30-acre [12.14-hectare] plot. “He was the eldest boy of 13 children, and he never learned

to read.” After moving north in the 1930s, “my mother did domestic work, and my father worked as a construction laborer,” he explains, “but he rented a small plot to farm.”

A talented athlete, Allen wasn’t allowed to practice sports until he finished his farm chores. “I thought, there’s got to be something better than this.” For a while, there was. He accepted a basketball scholarship from the University of Miami. After graduating, he played professionally, briefly in the American Basketball Association in Florida and then for a few seasons in Belgium. In his free time, Allen drove around the countryside, where he couldn’t help noticing the compost piles.



Will Allen went from the farm to college basketball, to professional basketball before becoming a successful salesman, farmer and founder of Growing Power.



Above: Will Allen inside one of the community greenhouses in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The farm provides cheap, healthy food for the neighborhood.

Left: Will Allen lectures at the PopTech 2009 conference in Camden, Maine. PopTech is a network of innovative leaders in science, technology, business, social entrepreneurship, media and other fields who partner for innovative change "to shape a more positive future."

"I started hanging out with Belgian farmers," Allen says. Eventually he moved to a house with a garden. Soon, he had 25 chickens and was growing the familiar foods of his youth — peas, beans, peanuts. "I just had to do it," he tells me. "It made me happy to touch the soil." On holidays, he cooked feasts for his teammates. He gave away a lot of eggs.

After retiring from basketball in 1977, Allen settled with his wife, Cyndy Bussler, and their three children in Oak Creek, just south of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where Cyndy's family owned farmland. At first, Allen grew vegetables for his family and sold the excess at Milwaukee's farmer's markets and in stores. Meanwhile, he worked as a district manager for Kentucky Fried Chicken, where he won sales awards. "It was just a job," he said. "I was aware it wasn't the greatest food, but I also knew that people didn't have a lot of choice about where to eat: There were no sit-down restaurants in that part of the city."

In 1987, Allen took a job with Procter & Gamble, where he won a marketing award for selling paper goods to supermarkets. "The job was so easy I could do it in half a day," he says. That left more time to grow vegetables. By now, Allen was donating food to a local food pantry. "I didn't like the idea of people eating all that canned food, that salty stuff." When he brought in his greens, he said, "it was the number one item selected off that carousel."

When Allen tells me, with a modest grin, about winning six more sales awards in a single year, I suddenly understand: This soil-loving farmer is a genius at selling — whether fried chicken, disposable diapers, arugula or red wrigglers. He can push his greens into corporate cafeterias, persuade the governor to help finance the construction of an anaerobic digester, wheedle new composting sites from

urban landlords, persuade Milwaukee's school board to buy his produce for its public schools and charm the blind into growing sprouts. ("I was cutting sprouts in the dark one night," Allen says, "and I realized you don't need sight to do this.")

Farm work is hard, nature can be cruel, and the pay is low; most small farmers work off-farm to make ends meet. The appeal of such labor to low-income urban dwellers — the demographic Allen most wants to reach — is not immediately apparent. And there is something almost fanciful in exhorting a person to grow food when he lives in an apartment or is not permitted to garden on the roof.

"Not everyone can grow food," Allen acknowledges. But he offers other ways of engaging with the soil, by involving people in community gardening. If that doesn't attract his Milwaukee neighbors, they can order a market basket or shop at his retail store, which sells fried pork skin and collard greens. "Culturally appropriate foods," Allen says.

This flexible approach may be one of Allen's most appealing qualities. His essential view is that people do the best they can: If they don't have any better food choices than high-fat fast food, that's okay, but let's work on changing that. If they don't know what to do with okra, Growing Power stands ready to help. And if their great-grandparents were sharecroppers and they have some bad feelings about farming, Allen has something to offer there too: His personal example and workshops geared toward empowering minorities, many of whom have had negative experiences. "I can break through a lot of that very quickly because a lot of people of color are so proud, so happy to see me leading this kind of movement," he says.

When Allen bought the Growing Power property, a derelict plant nursery that was in foreclosure, in 1993, he had no master plan. "I told the city I'd

hire kids and teach them about food systems," he says. Soon community and school groups were asking for his help starting gardens. He rarely said no. In 1995, he partnered with Heifer International, the sustainable-agriculture charity. "They were looking for youth to do urban ag. When they learned I had kids and that I had land, their eyes lit up."

Today, Growing Power is working in other cities, including Detroit, Chicago, Denver and Louisville, Kentucky. The Milwaukee farm hopes to expand vertically, with a five-story farm, and horizontally, with more compost piles. Allen, who's writing a book called *The Good Food Revolution*, travels the world, an ambassador for strengthening community food systems. But he still manages, he says, to touch the soil every day. ❁

(Based on an article first published by the New York Times Magazine on July 5, 2009.)

Elizabeth Royte is the author of *Bottlemania: Big Business, Local Springs, and the Battle Over America's Drinking Water* (2009); *Garbage Land: On the Secret Trail of Trash* (2005) and *The Tapir's Morning Bath: Solving the Mysteries of the Tropical Rain Forest* (2002). Her writing on science and the environment has appeared in Harper's, National Geographic, Outside and other publications.

GROWING POWER

Son of a sharecropper — a farmer who shares a percentage of his yield with a landlord — Will Allen played college and professional basketball, and was a successful salesman, but returned to his farming roots. With a desire to make fresh, locally grown food available to low-income urban neighborhoods, he founded Growing Power, Inc., an urban farm cooperative, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. A 2008 MacArthur fellow, Allen was among the *Time* 100, *Time* magazine's list of the 100 most influential people in the world, in 2010.





Right: Will Allen delights in showing off Growing Power's beehives. Urban honey is particularly good because of the diversity of nectars the bees can find, and a healthy hive will produce up to 100 pounds a year. Bee pollination greatly increases the yields of plants such as tomatoes and peppers. Above: Dressed in protective clothing, beekeepers examine the yield in a honeycomb extracted from a hive on the Growing Power farm.



Will Allen's favorite stop on the Growing Power tour is the tilapia pond, part of the farm's aquaponics systems. Aquaponics blends aquaculture and hydroponics to convert fish waste into nitrates to feed plants. Plants remove nitrates from the water, which are recycled to the fish tank, replicating a healthy natural wetland. Growing Power also raises lake perch, a species that has disappeared from nearby Lake Michigan.



At the request of Milwaukee mayor Tom Barrett, Growing Power installed a vegetable garden at City Hall in 2009. The Mayor's Garden has produced 550 pounds of produce for local food pantries that serve the city's poor.



Workers bend over trays, planting seeds to start a new crop. The Growing Power farms, staffed by volunteers and a few core employees from the neighborhood, enable low-income families to obtain affordable fresh produce.



Will Allen (left) listens to workshop participants who have come to learn about urban farming and receive intensive, hands-on training to develop, operate and sustain their own community food projects. The Commercial Urban Agriculture Program trains urban farmers. Growing Power runs regional outreach training centers in Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi and Virginia.



Compost is king at Growing Power, especially when it is rich with earthworms. Young volunteers fill a wheelbarrow with this black gold, to be spread over growing crops.



Two Chicago residents benefit from Growing Power's community garden in South Side Chicago's Jackson Park neighborhood. There is another garden at Cabrini-Green and a larger, 20,000-square-foot urban farm at Grant Park. More urban farms are in the works in other U.S. cities.



Growing Power markets farm-fresh vegetables to restaurants, and several dozen buy from Growing Power's urban farms in Milwaukee and Chicago. What better way to interest restaurants than to conduct a chef's tour of the farm? Here local chefs sample the greens.



A patron of Growing Power's neighborhood farmer's markets makes a selection. There are several such markets in Milwaukee and Chicago to supply affordable fresh food to urban neighborhoods. Growing Power also partners in a "market basket" program to provide fresh produce from local farmers who are members of the Rainbow Farmers Cooperative, begun by Growing Power in 1991.

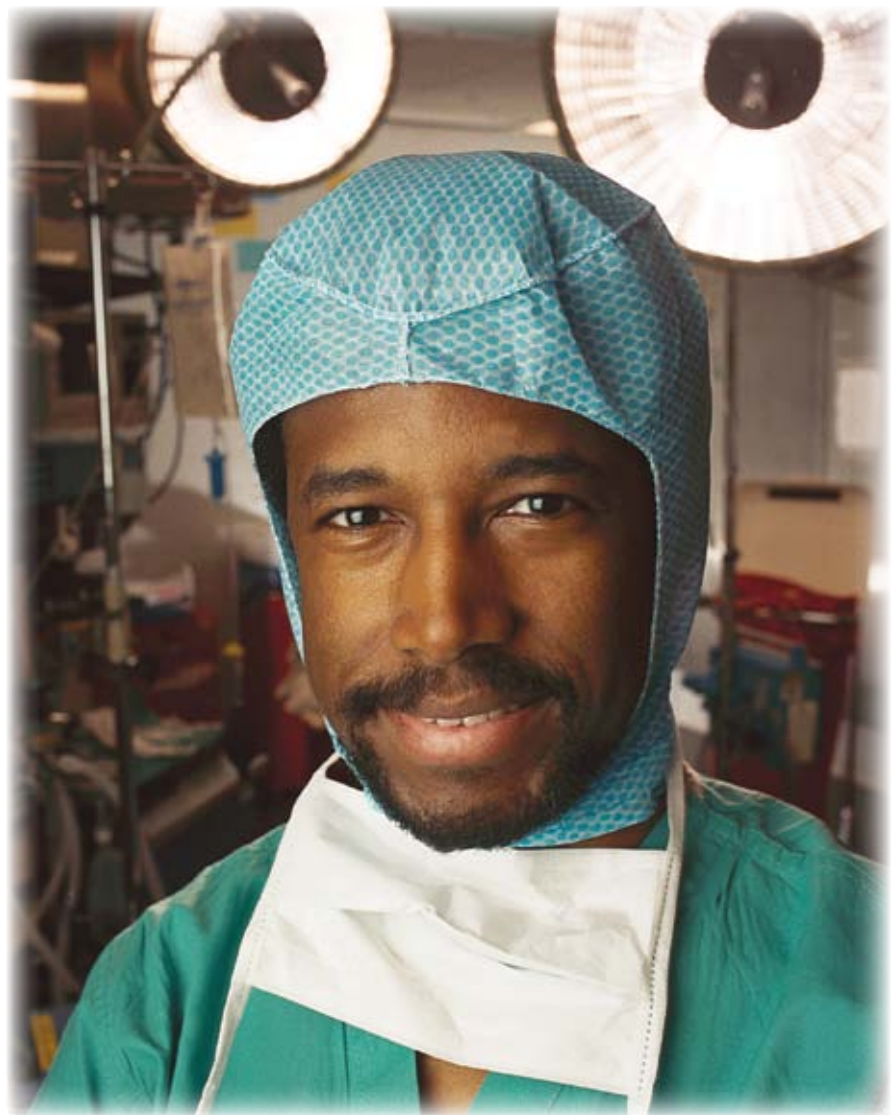
Ben Carson

GIFTED NEUROSURGEON

by **Kenneth J. Cooper**

Ben Carson was “a ghetto kid from the streets of Detroit,” he writes in his autobiography, at a time when the United States was undergoing the crucible of the civil rights movement and making the tumultuous transition from a segregated society. That poor black kid who lived in dilapidated tenements and struggled early in school grew up to be Dr. Ben Carson, one of the world’s greatest neurosurgeons. He has mastered complicated, marathon operations, saving and enhancing the lives of thousands of children with his gifted hands.

After three decades at the Johns Hopkins Hospital Children’s Center in Baltimore, Maryland, the virtuoso neurosurgeon can count on his fingers the number of bad outcomes from his delicate operations on the brains of children with neurological problems. Carson achieved major medical advances early in his career at the renowned teaching hospital. In 1985, he perfected the hemispherectomy, a procedure for removing half the brain of young children afflicted with chronic seizures without significantly impairing their development or functioning. Once considered too risky and harmful,



Neurosurgeon Ben Carson pioneered delicate brain surgery techniques.

hemispherectomies are now standard medical practice, and Carson has helped more than 100 children with

such surgery. Two years after making that medical breakthrough, Carson led a 70-member surgical team that



performed the first successful operation to separate conjoined twins who were joined at the head. The German twins survived an operation that lasted nearly a whole day.

The U.S. Library of Congress in 2001 named Carson one of 89 “Living Legends,” and in 2008 former President George W. Bush awarded Carson the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest honor the U.S. government bestows on civilians. Popular recognition has come with the television movie *Gifted Hands: The Ben Carson Story* (2009), about his remarkable life and achievements.

A fervent Christian who reads the Bible every morning and prays with his patients, Carson is committed to helping others succeed. He has trimmed back his enormous surgical load to concentrate on training the next generation at the Johns Hopkins Hospital Children’s Center, where he has directed the Division of Pediatric Neurosurgery for a quarter century. He has written four books and

gives many speeches, all intended to inspire the young to set high goals for themselves and to work hard to attain them. For two decades, he and his wife Lacena (“Candy”) have run a national charity, the Carson Scholar’s Fund, that provides college scholarships to outstanding community-minded students and funds reading rooms inside elementary schools that lack libraries. His goal is to help others follow a path to success similar to the one he took, applying the traditional virtues of discipline, hard work and faith.

Humble Beginnings

Benjamin Solomon Carson Sr. was born September 18, 1951, in Detroit, Michigan, the younger son of Robert and Sonya Carson. His father worked in a car factory in the auto-making center. As a nuclear family, the Carsons bought a home and prospered, at first.

“He had a good job at one of the factories,” Carson says of his father. “My mother was an extremely good manager

Ben Carson (center) and his team perform surgery at Johns Hopkins Children’s Center. Opposite page: Carson frequently encourages young people to pursue higher education, and started a scholarship fund to help economically disadvantaged students. Here he shares his story with secondary school students in Roswell, New Mexico.

of money and, in fact, she was able to take from the money that he earned, save and invest. They actually owned several properties in Detroit early on. He subsequently got into drugs and alcohol and messed everything up.”

Poverty followed the divorce. Sonya, who had only a third-grade education, and young sons Curtis and Ben moved in with relatives in Boston, Massachusetts. There they lived in dilapidated tenements infested with rats and roaches in tough neighborhoods beset with crime and violence. After two years, Sonya had saved enough money from her jobs as a domestic household worker to move the family back to Detroit. Though



the family's flat there was in a similar condition, at least Sonya was not dependent on relatives or government grants to the poor.

"She worked a lot," her son recalls. "Sometimes we wouldn't even see her the whole week. She would leave at 5 in the morning, and get back at 11 or midnight, going from one job to the next because she just was determined not to be one of those welfare-type moms."

Her young sons, though, were not doing well in school. In the fifth grade, Carson remembers classmates calling him "the safety net" because "no one ever had to worry about getting the lowest score on a test as long as I was there."

Carson is thankful now that his mother was "very observant." As she worked in the homes of wealthy white families, Sonya noticed their children spent after-school hours studying and reading while her boys were playing or watching television.

"So one day, after praying a lot, she came home and said: 'That's what you're going to do. You're going to start reading books. You're going to turn this silly TV off. To make sure you're reading, you're going to give me book reports,'" Ben Carson recalls. "Of course, I thought that was ridiculous."

Initially, the boys also balked at the other after-school activity their mother imposed, learning the multiplication

tables. They resisted until she pointed out that if she — with a third-grade education — could learn the tables through 12, so could they. Her sons obeyed her commands to read two books a week borrowed from the public library, to write reports about each and to memorize the arithmetic.

Carson immersed himself in reading, which he credits for his academic turnaround. In particular, he cites the inspiring trajectory of *Up From Slavery*, the autobiography of Booker T. Washington, who was born a slave but founded a university and advised two U.S. presidents. He found similar lessons about perseverance and the pursuit of excellence in the biblical story

of Joseph. Enslaved and then unjustly imprisoned, Joseph ultimately became prime minister of ancient Egypt.

"I got to the point if I had five minutes, I was reading a book," Carson says. "It didn't matter where I was — waiting for the bus, on the bus, at the dinner table. My mother, who was always after us to read, would say: 'Benjamin, put the book down and eat your food.'"

Developing Gifted Hands

Carson rose to the top of his eighth-grade class then graduated from high school with an academic record strong enough to get into Yale University. From his early teens, he had his mind set on becoming a doctor. His study habits, however, weren't adequate for the Ivy League school in New Haven, Connecticut. As a freshman, he was in danger of failing a chemistry course required of pre-med students. He prayed for guidance. Miraculously, the night before the final exam he dreamed about chemistry problems written on a chalkboard. They turned out to be the questions on the test. He passed and afterward promised God he would cease his last-minute cramming.

Medical school at the University of Michigan was the next hurdle. Once again, intensive reading, as much as eight hours a day, got him through after faltering on the first set of comprehensive exams. He began his postgraduate training as a physician at Johns Hopkins Children's Center and completed it at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital of Queen Elizabeth II Medical Centre in Perth, Australia. He returned to Hopkins Children's and, when the incumbent departed to take another job, became the chief of pediatric neurosurgery and, in fact, the sole surgeon on that staff at the time. He was 33.

Blessings of Gifted Hands

Carson's promotion at a relatively young age came because of the considerable skill he demonstrated in the operating room. He credits meticulous preparation, extraordinary hand-eye coordination and an uncommon ability to envision a brain in three dimensions, even when parts of the organ are not visible. Carson performed his first hemispherectomy in 1985 on Maranda Francisco, then four, who lived in Denver, Colorado. It was successful. She and hundreds of subsequent patients manage without half their brains because, at a young age, the remaining cells are adaptable enough to take over the functions of the missing hemisphere.

Before long, parents from across the United States and abroad were delivering their severely impaired children into his caring hands. Among these were Theresa and Josef Binder, from Ulm, Germany. They brought their newborn twin boys, who were conjoined at the back of the head. The twins were successfully separated in 1987, after a complex and difficult 22-hour surgery by a team of surgeons led by Carson. It was the first surgery of its kind, and the twins survived. After that, Carson traveled overseas to help medical teams separate two sets of twins in South Africa and one in Singapore. The 2003 operation in Singapore on the Bijani sisters, 29-year-old Iranian law students, was one of Carson's few surgical failures. Both died within a few hours.

It has been a long journey for Dr. Ben Carson, from impoverished ghettos to international acclaim. Beyond his own dedication and devoted mother Sonya, he credits unseen hands behind his own "gifted hands." He is a Seventh-day Adventist, a Christian denomination that worships on Saturday instead of Sunday. He believes in miracles.

"Absolutely, without question. I've seen them way too many times," Carson says. "I have a fervent belief in God. ... I know myself, and I look at the kinds of cases I've been involved in — you know, I'm good, but I'm not that good. So I know that there is something behind me. A lot of times I just get these impressions about doing things, and where do they come from? I just know that there is something more than meets the eye." ❀

Kenneth J. Cooper, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, has been a newspaper reporter and editor for nearly 30 years, at the Washington Post, Boston Globe, St. Louis American and St. Louis Post-Dispatch, as well as Knight Ridder. In 1984 he shared a Pulitzer Prize for "The Race Factor," a Boston Globe series. He has covered U.S. federal politics and social policies and was Delhi-based South Asia correspondent for the Washington Post. He returned to the Boston Globe as national editor from 2001 to 2005, after which he was a fellow at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government.

GIFTED HANDS

“Coming Into My Own”

From *Gifted Hands* (1996) by Ben Carson, with Cecil Murphey

The nurse looked at me with disinterest as I walked toward her station. “Yes?” she asked, pausing with a pencil in her hand. “Who did you come to pick up?” From the tone of her voice I immediately knew that she thought that I was an orderly. I was wearing my green scrubs, nothing to indicate that I was a doctor.

“I didn’t come to pick up anyone.” I looked at her and smiled, realizing that the only Black people she had seen on the floor had been orderlies. Why should she think anything else? “I’m the new intern.”

“New intern? But you can’t — I mean — I didn’t mean to —” the nurse stuttered, trying to apologize without sounding prejudiced.

“That’s OK,” I said, letting her off the hook. It was a natural mistake. “I’m new, so why should you know who I am?”

The first time I went into the Intensive Care Unit, I was wearing my whites (our monkey suits as we interns called them), and a nurse signaled me. “You’re here for Mr. Jordan?”

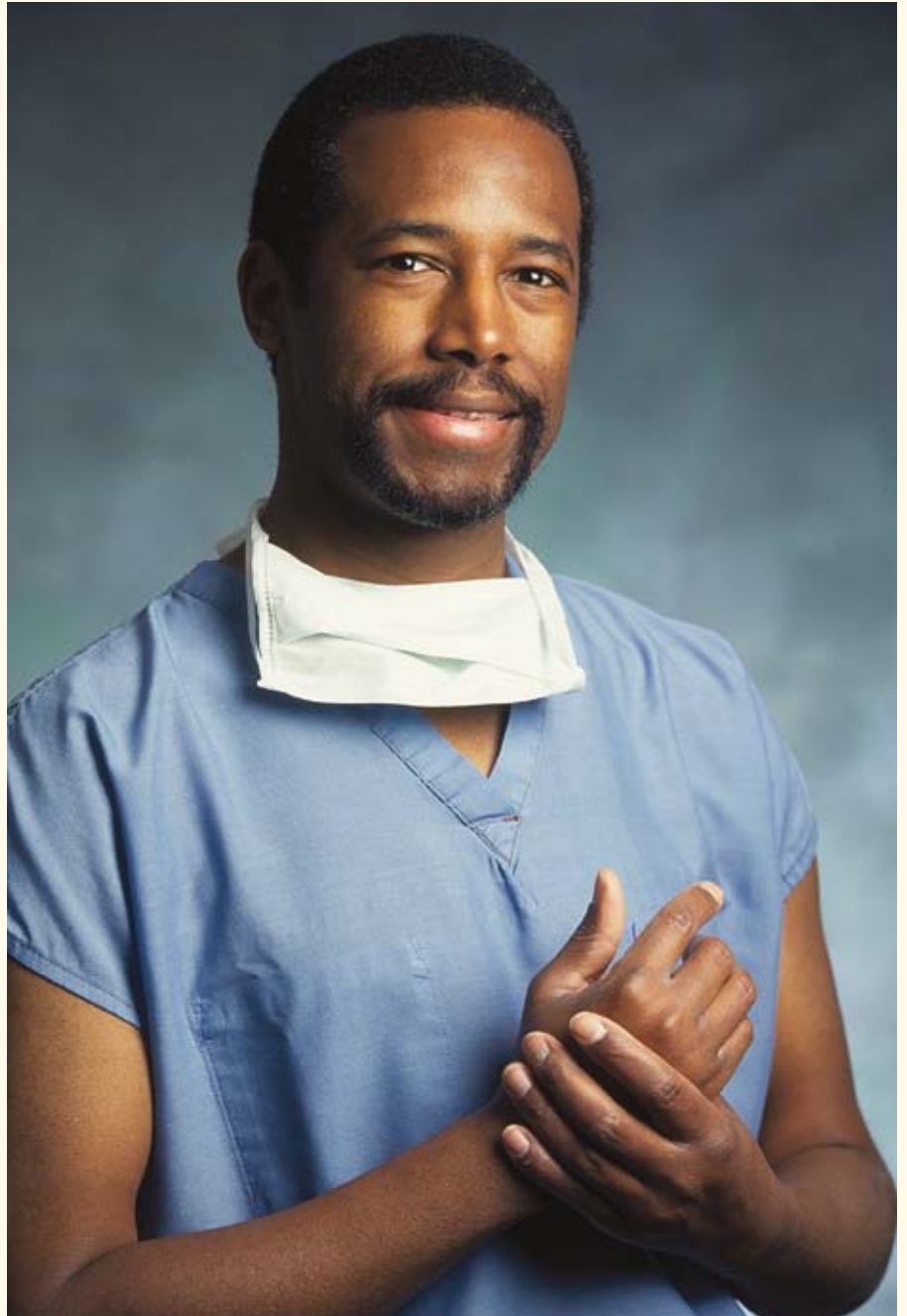
“No, Ma’am, I’m not.”

“You sure?” she asked as a frown covered her forehead. “He’s the only one who’s scheduled for respiratory therapy today.”

By then I had come closer and she could read my name badge and the word intern under my name.

“Oh, I’m so very sorry,” she said, and I could tell she was.

Although I didn’t say it, I would like to have told her, “It’s all right because I realize most people do things based on



Dr. Ben Carson, self-described as “a ghetto kid from the streets of Detroit,” overcame economic and other hurdles to attend Yale University and ultimately become one of the world’s foremost neurosurgeons.

their past experiences. You've never encountered a Black intern before, so you assumed I was the only kind of Black male you'd seen wearing whites, a respiratory therapist." I smiled again and went on.

It was inevitable that a few white patients didn't want a Black doctor, and they protested to Dr. Long. One woman said, "I'm sorry, but I do not want a Black physician on my case."

Dr. Long had a standard answer, given in a calm but firm voice. "There's the door. You're welcome to walk through it. But if you stay here, Dr. Carson will handle your case."

At the time people were making these objections, I didn't know about them. Only much later did Dr. Long tell me as he laughed about the prejudices of some patients. But there was no humor in his voice when he defined his position. He was adamant about his stance, allowing no prejudice because of color or ethnic background.

Of course, I knew how some individuals felt. I would have had to be pretty insensitive not to know. The way they behaved, the coldness, even without saying anything, made their feelings clear. Each time, however, I was able to remind myself they were individuals speaking for themselves and not representative of all Whites. No matter how strongly a patient felt, as soon as he voiced his objection he learned that Dr. Long would dismiss him on the spot if he said anything more. So far as I know, none of the patients ever left!

I honestly felt no great pressures. When I did encounter prejudice, I could hear Mother's voice in the back of my head saying things like, "Some people are ignorant and you have to educate them."

The only pressure I felt during my internship, and in the years since, has been a self-imposed obligation to act as a role model for Black youngsters. These young folks need to know that the way to escape their often dismal situations is contained within themselves. They can't expect other people to do it for them. Perhaps I can't do much, but I can provide one living example of someone who made it and who came from what we now call a disadvantaged background. Basically I'm no different than many of them.

As I think of Black youth, I also want to say I believe that many of our pressing racial problems will be taken care of when we who are among the minorities will stand on our own feet and refuse to look to anybody else to save us from our situations. The culture in which we live stresses looking out for number one. Without adopting such a self-centered value system, we can demand the best of ourselves while we are extending our hands to help others.

I see glimmers of hope. For example, I noticed that when the Vietnamese came to the United States they often faced prejudice from everyone — White, Black, and Hispanics. But they didn't beg for handouts and often took the lowest jobs offered. Even well-educated individuals didn't mind sweeping floors if it was a paying job.

Today many of these same Vietnamese are property owners and entrepreneurs. That's the message I try to get across to the young people. The same opportunities are there, but we can't start out as vice president of the company. Even if we landed such a position, it wouldn't do us any good anyway because we wouldn't know how to do our work. It's better to start where we can fit in and then work our way up.

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